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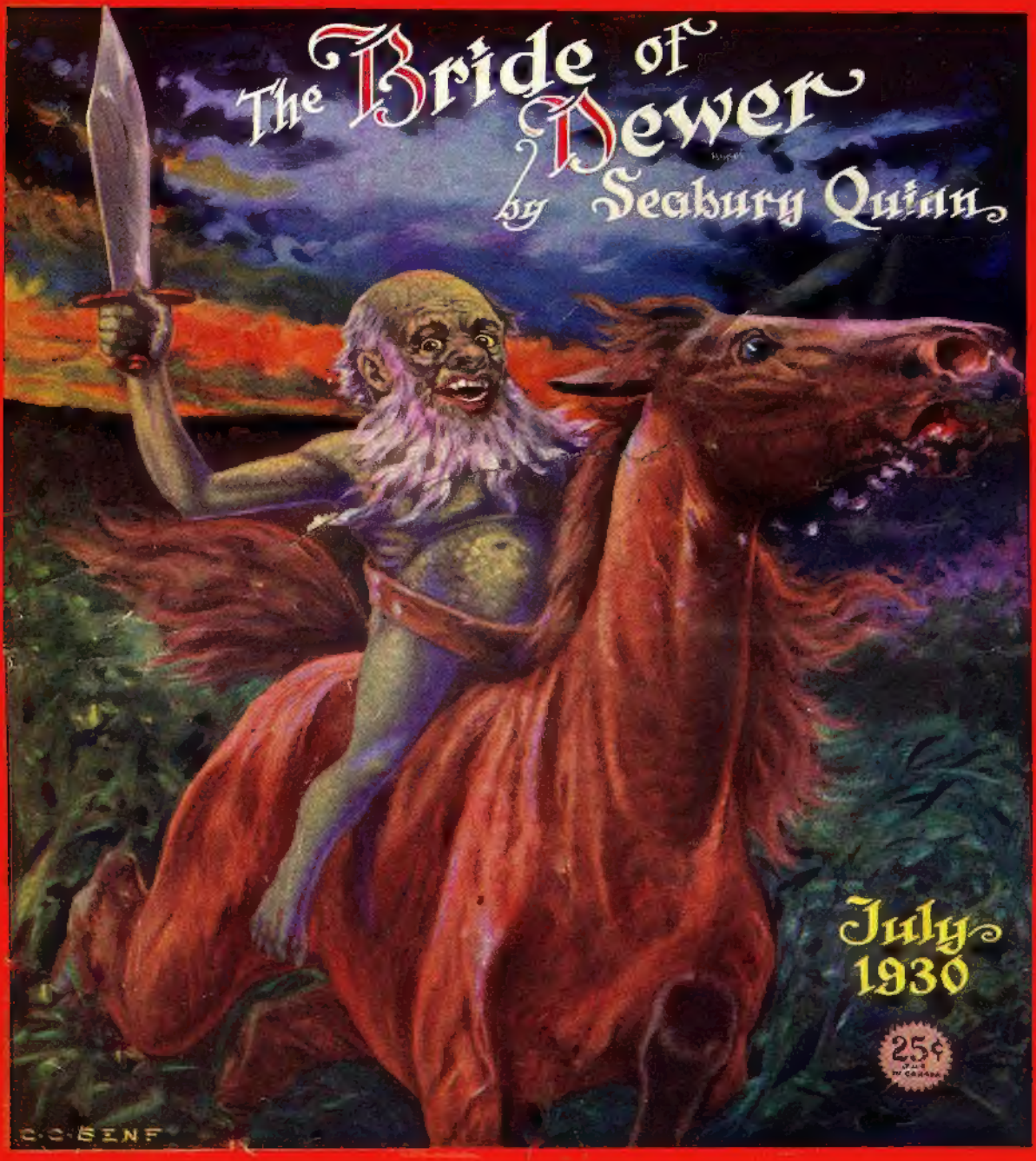

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVI NUMBER 1

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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THE EYRIE

THE May issue of WEIRD TALES has found unusual favor with you, the readers. The story that you liked best, as shown by your votes, was *The End of the Story,* by Clark Ashton Smith. *Light-Echoes,* by Everil Worrell, and *The Brain-Thief,* by Seabury Quinn, are in an exact tie for second place as this issue goes to press.

Brockwell Wundt, of Los Angeles, writes to the Eyrie: "Permit me to acknowledge my appreciation for some of the stories in your magazine. From the standpoint of the psychology of fancy, not all of the work you publish is sound. But, as a rule, the stories are all good reading—entertaining and diverting: the essential qualities which constitute good fiction. I have been especially pleased with *The Dancer in the Crystal,* by Francis Flagg. It has that factor, or rather atmosphere of reality which is the strong point in putting over a weird tale. The story in question seems to have come from a reservoir of deep learning. In fact, I find that most of the author's work reads as though it were the casual and well-formed outcropping of a mind of vast erudition. It is indeed simple, convincing and well handled. I am a professional man and hail as having great personal value those pastimes which bring diversion to my mind after the close of a strenuous day. Many of the stories in WEIRD TALES fall under this category."

"Here's a question you have dodged in my other letters," writes J. Wasso, Jr., of Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania. "Be a sport—answer it: When will you publish Lovecraft's works in book form?" [We hope to publish a book of Mr. Lovecraft's stories some time, but it will not be this year.—THE EDITORS.]

"Are you ever going to publish a collection of Jules de Grandin stories in book form?" inquires Jack Darrow, of Chicago. "If you do, I hope that you will include the very first ones in the collection. The May issue of WEIRD TALES had some unusually fine stories. I consider *The Sun People,* by Edmond Hamilton, the best story in the issue and *The Black Monarch* by Paul Ernst and *The Brain-Thief* by Quinn, second and third place." [We hope to publish a book of de Grandin stories some time next year.—THE EDITORS.]

George H. Wagmann, of Brownwood, Texas, writes to the Eyrie: "I

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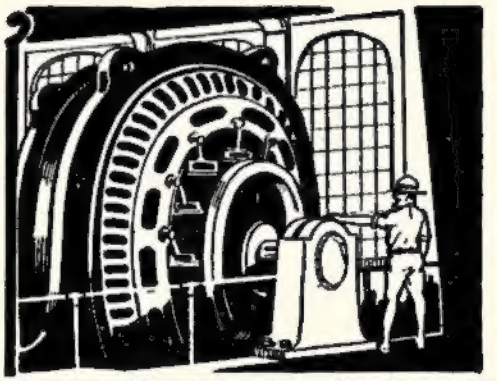
You Fellows Who Want BIG PAY Get into ELECTRICITY



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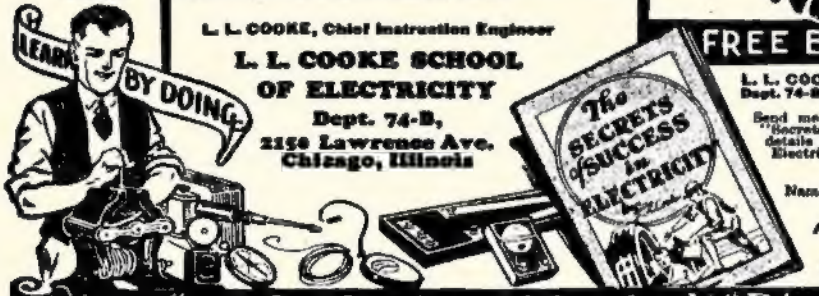

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

(Continued from page 4)

notice that in your May issue of WEIRD TALES someone is pleading for more stories by Murray Leinster. Let me add my plea to his in asking for more works by that exceedingly interesting author. I consider his *The Strange People* the best story you have published since I have been reading WEIRD TALES. Keep on giving us stories by Seabury Quinn. He is one of my favorite authors. I consider Seabury Quinn's *The Brain-Thief* the best story in the May issue. It is followed, as a close second, by *River of Lost Souls* by R. C. Sandison."

A letter from L. B. Ballou, of Phoenix, Arizona, says: "My vote on the enclosed coupon about *The Sun People* is the only kick or near-kick I have ever had on your stories in the four years I have been reading WEIRD TALES. I should say, rather, that all of your last issue was so fine that I can only differentiate by saying I like *The Sun People* least and *Light-Echoes* most. I have had some experiences or hallucinations (quien sabe?) that make me believe Worrell was not drawing on imagination entirely."

Mrs. M. Kliman, of Detroit, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been one of your most loyal readers since its first issue—in fact have not missed one single copy. Others may tie that but they can't beat it. And I have kept silent long enough—I must tell you that I think we have the peer of all magazines in WEIRD TALES. I can never wait till time for its appearance. But—and it is on this that I want to speak—you have of late introduced so few newcomers and include the same names in every issue that I can now detect a flaw in the delicate fabrics of imagination you offer us. I know I am going to bring all Weirdom down about my ears, but I am frankly tired of Edmond Hamilton's everlasting Federation of Suns. He uses the same situation in all, namely, the impending doom of the Galaxy. Can't we remedy this in some way? And now I approach sacred territory—Jules de Grandin. He is one of my favorites, but can't Seabury Quinn take him and Friend Trowbridge out of Harrisonville? It would seem that one city is the only spot left where our beloved Jules may spin his webs—and what a demon-infested place to live! Too long has he tarried in a prosaic little city. Let him conquer new worlds. And one suggestion: Just once—in a really, gripping, tragically sad tale I would like to have de Grandin bested—just once. Don't you think it would make him even more human and lovable than he is now? Try it and see. *The End of the Story* is easily the best tale in the May number—a splendidly written and interest-holding story. I like really weird tales—more werewolves, vampires and honest-to-goodness ghosts, if you please. What has become of Greye La Spina? A sterling writer." [A new serial by Greye La Spina, called *The Portal to Power*, will begin in WEIRD TALES in a few months.—THE EDITORS.]

"I must say a few words in praise of that remarkable story, *The Land of Lur*," Edwin Beard, of St. Louis, writes to the Eyrie. "It is one of the most remarkable stories I ever read. The constant alliteration is remarkable,

(Continued on page 8)

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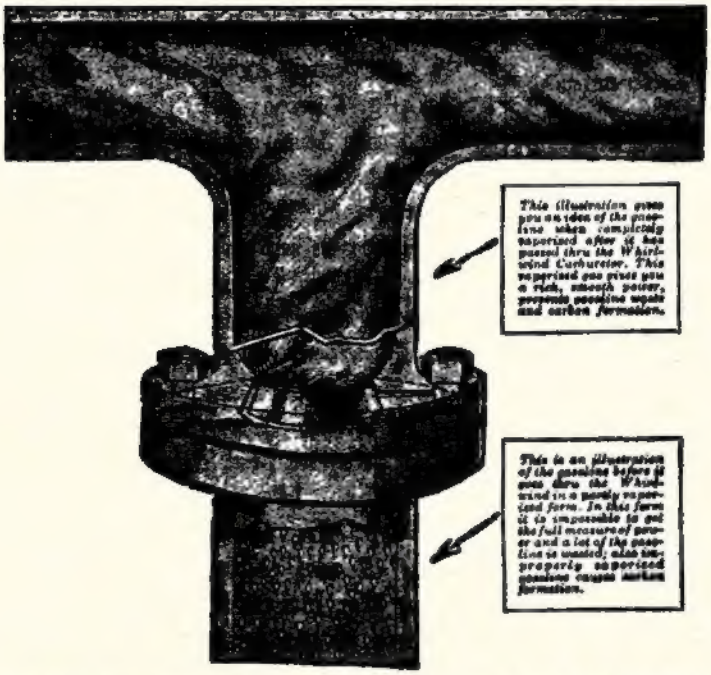
This illustration gives you an idea of the gasoline when completely vaporized after it has passed thru the Whirlwind Carburetor. This vaporized gas gives you a rich, smooth power, prevents gasoline waste and carbon formation.
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(Continued from page 6)

but more so are the examples (few enough nowadays) of onomatopeia. It is a real masterpiece. I thoroughly enjoyed *The Brain-Thief* by Quinn. Instant assassination is in store for the editor should Jules de Grandin fail to appear in W. T. By the name of a fat and exceedingly immoral green pig, I swear it! This delightful Frenchman is one of your best drawing-cards, in case you don't know it."

Howard S. Whiteside, of Concord, New Hampshire, writes to the Eyrie: "In your May issue you have atoned for many a crime by one thing: the poem, *Shadows on the Road*, by Robert E. Howard. That is really a great piece of work. I can't say too much for it. It's the best thing you've had for months. If possible, print more poems by Mr. Howard in the near future. I am taking the liberty of putting Mr. Howard's poem down on the blank as the best piece of writing in the issue although it is not a story."

"I think your magazine one of the few outposts of the human imagination still left in the age of stale realism," writes Benjamin De Casseres, of New York City. "I enjoyed particularly in the May issue *The End of the Story*, by Clark Ashton Smith, which is not only a philosophic thriller but possesses real literary quality, which is not lost (on the contrary) on readers, such as you have, of imaginative tales."

"WEIRD TALES gets better month by month," writes Cad Young, Jr., of Constantine, Michigan. "*The End of the Story* was beautiful; *Light-Echoes* had a human quality seldom found. *Seven Drops of Blood* was good too;

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

and of course good old Frank Stockton's *The Magic Egg.* I liked very much *River of Lost Souls;* it made a point not widely understood — that the vampire and werewolf come in other forms, such as the toad. I am looking forward to reading *The Rats in the Walls* again."

Clark Ashton Smith writes from his home in Auburn, California: "*The Black Monarch* certainly contains some imaginative ideas. I enjoyed most of the stories in the current issue; and the poems by Lovecraft and Wandrei certainly lend distinction. But I wish to heaven that H. P. L. would write some more stories."

"I want to thank you," writes Carl Wilhelmson, of Phoenix, Arizona, "for the enjoyment I had in reading that superior and fascinating tale, *The End of the Story,* by Clark Ashton Smith, in your May issue; and to express my admiration for your taste, since from a prolonged perusal of American magazines I am under the impression that in the publications pretending to culture and sophistication one would look in vain for the writings of anyone of the caliber of Mr. Smith—a true poet."

Henry Kuttner, of Los Angeles, writes to the Eyrie: "A word of inquiry—I can not understand why you do not publish in the reprint department each month a story from early files of WEIRD TALES. If you think that the readers do not want it, just ask them to include in their monthly vote a statement as to their reprint preferences. I am sure that even those who have read WEIRD TALES from the

(Continued on page 13)

IT IS NOT TOO LATE—

to read one of the most popular stories that has been printed in this magazine to date. Through popular demand we have published a cloth-bound edition of "The Moon Terror," by A. G. Birch, to fulfill the wishes of those who were not fortunate enough to read this startling story when it appeared serially in the early issues of WEIRD TALES.

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(Continued from page 10)

beginning would not mind one story each month for the less fortunate ones."

H. P. Lovecraft writes that he has gone through his file of WEIRD TALES from the beginning and has picked out the following stories as having the greatest amount of truly cosmic horror and macabre convincingness: *Beyond the Door* by Paul Suter, *The Floor Above* by M. L. Humphreys, *The Night Wire* by H. F. Arnold, *The Canal* by Everil Worrell, *Bells of Oceana* by Arthur J. Burks, and *In Amundsen's Tent* by John Martin Leahy. All or most of these will be used later as Weird Story Reprints.

Well, readers, after all these bouquets we will print a couple of brickbats. Florence Jackson, of Kansas City, Missouri, writes to the Eyrie: "I have just read the Eyrie of the April issue. I read Harold Markham's criticism of your covers and I heartily second it. I think your covers are terrible and not a bit appropriate. The illustrations are just as bad; they couldn't be any worse. I can hardly wait until the first of the month to get the magazine, but I always remove the covers before bringing it home. The stories are marvelous and WEIRD TALES is my favorite magazine. This is the only objection I have to it, and if it could be removed I think WEIRD TALES would be perfect."

The other brickbat is thrown by Jack Darrow, of Chicago: "The stories in WEIRD TALES aren't weird enough. I would like to see more thrillers like *The Space-Eaters* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., and stories by Eli Colter, Arthur J. Burks and H. P. Lovecraft. *Drome* and *The Master of Doom* are stories I'll never forget. Is WEIRD TALES going down? Edmond Hamilton is always good. I give his story, *The Plant Revolt*, first place in the April issue. *The Black Monarch* is my choice for second place, and *The Dust of Egypt* third. How about using a better grade of paper in WEIRD TALES?"

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JULY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why? ----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

NEXT MONTH

A group of amazingly fine stories is to appear in the August issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale July 1.

The Hills of the Dead

by Robert E. Howard

A story of Solomon Kane, the Puritan adventurer, and a silent gray city of vampires—a powerful and eery tale.

The Curse of Ximu-Tal

by Harry Noyes Pratt

A blood-freezing story of a heathen temple in the jungle, and a green jade snake that could swallow an elephant.

Daughter of the Moonlight

by Seabury Quinn

A tale of stark horror—a brilliant exploit of the little French scientist and occultist, Jules de Grandin—a graveyard story.

Pigmy Island

by Edmond Hamilton

A powerful story of tiny men and giant rats and snakes. Don't miss it!

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by Grace M. Campbell

A startling werewolf story—a tragic yet tender tale of the slim white shape that ran with the pack when the wolves were hunting human game.

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by Arlton Eadie

Faithful even in death to his murdered master, the phantom deerhound came baying across the moors—and revealed the murder to young Lord Malcolm's avengers.

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An amazing, gripping story by Dr. de Castro, author of "The Last Test" and co-author with Ambrose Bierce of "The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter."

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the August issue of WEIRD TALES

August Issue on Sale July 1

Subscription Rates: $2.50 a year in U. S. or possessions; Canadian $3.00; Foreign $3.50.
WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill.

"I WALTER take thee Rosemary to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse——"

Dr. Bentley's measured, evenly modulated words, echoed by the bridegroom's somewhat tremulous repetitions, sounded through St. Philip's.

"*Eh bien,*" irrepressible at church as elsewhere, Jules de Grandin whispered in my ear, "I feel myself about to weep in concert with the attenuated lady in lavender yonder, Friend Trowbridge. We may hold back the tears at a funeral, for the poor defunct one's troubles are over and done, but at a wedding—*pardieu,* who can prophesy the outcome?"

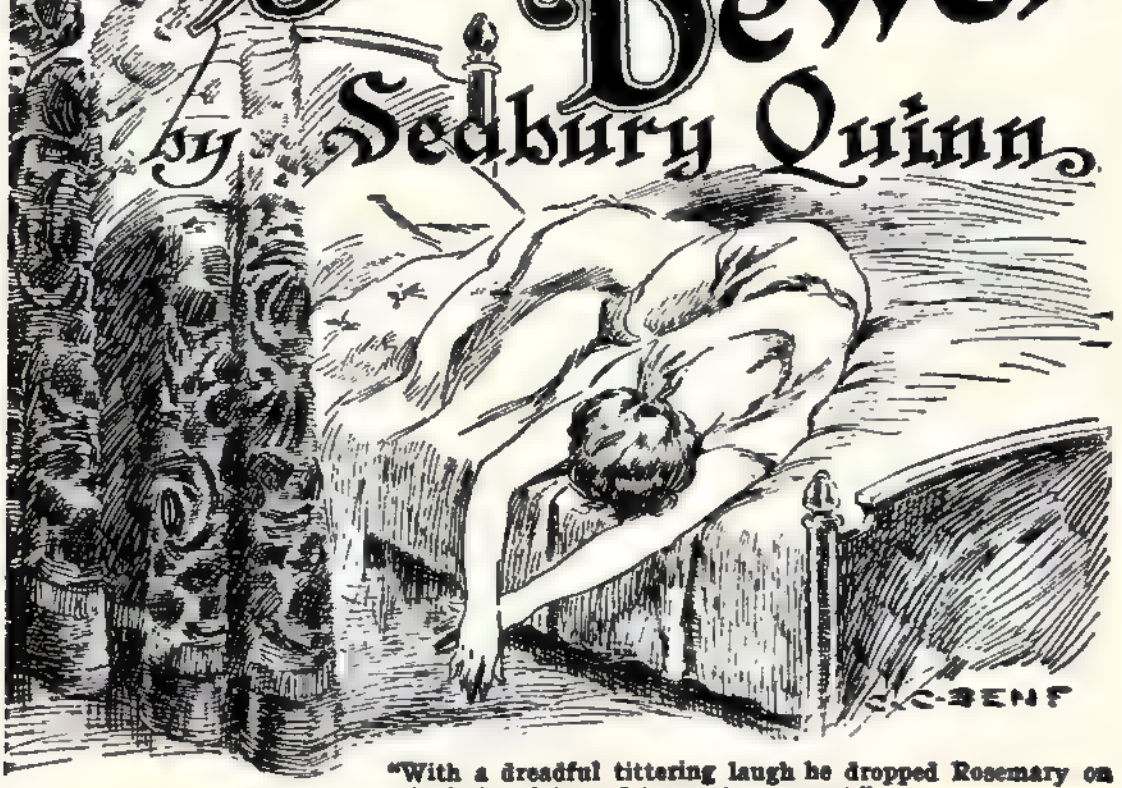
"S-s-sh!" I commanded, reinforcing my scandalized frown with a sharp dig of my elbow in his ribs. "Can't you be quiet *anywhere?*"

"Under compulsion, yes," he responded, grinning elfishly at my embarrassment, but——"

"——and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring, and by joining hands, I now pronounce that they are man and wife"—Dr.

Bride of Dewer

by Sedbury Quinn



"With a dreadful tittering laugh he dropped Rosemary on the bed and turned to meet my onset."

Bentley's announcement concluded the ceremony, and the majestic strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March drowned out the Frenchman's chatter.

Somewhat later, at the bride's home, de Grandin, pleasantly warmed by several glasses of champagne punch, lifted Rosemary Whitney's white-gloved hand to his lips. "Madame Whitney," he assured her, and his little blue eyes swam with sudden tears, "may the happiness of this night be the smallest part of the happiness which lies in store for you; may you and Monsieur Whitney be always happy as I should have been, had not *le bon Dieu* willed otherwise!"

He was strangely silent on the way home. The propensity to chatter which kept his nimble tongue wagging most of his waking hours seemed to have deserted him entirely. Once or twice he heaved a deep, sentimental sigh; as we prepared for bed he forebore to make his usual complimentary remark about the excellence of my brandy, and even omitted to damn the instigators of the Eighteenth Amendment.

IT MIGHT have been three o'clock, perhaps a bit later, when the shrewish, insistent scolding of my telephone bell woke me.

"Doctor — Dr. Trowbridge" — the voice across the wire was low and muted, as though smothered beneath

a weight of sobs—"can you come over right away? Please! This is Mrs. Winnicott, and—it—it's Rosemary. Doctor, she's home, and—yes, yes," evidently she turned to someone at her elbow, "right away." Once more, to me: "Oh, Doctor, *please* hurry!"

I was out of bed and beginning to dress almost before the sharp click in my ear told me Mrs. Winnicott had hung up, but swift as I was, Jules de Grandin was quicker. The chatter of the bell had roused him, and from the doorway of my room he had heard enough to realize an urgent call had come. While I still fumbled, cursing, at the fastenings of my collar, he passed down the upper hall, fully dressed. With my medicine and instrument kits in readiness he was waiting in the lower passage as I clattered down the stairs.

"It's Rosemary Winnicott—Whitney, I mean," I corrected myself. "Her mother just 'phoned, and though she wasn't specific I gathered something dreadful has happened."

"*Mordieu, la petite Madame la Mariée?*" he exclaimed. "*Ohé*, this is monstrous, my friend! Hurry; make haste!"

A round, red sun, precursor of a broiling June day, was slowly creeping over the horizon as we reached the Winnicott house and dashed through the front door without the formality of knocking.

In her pretty pink-and-ivory chamber Rosemary Whitney lay, pale as an image graven out of marble beneath the damask counterpane of the virginal bed she had risen from the previous morning with such sweet day-dreams as young girls know upon their wedding morns. Her eyes were quiet, though not closed, and her lips, blenched as though bereft of every drop of blood, were slightly parted. Once or twice she turned her head upon the pillow, weakly, like a fever patient, and emitted a little, frightened moan. That was all.

Impotent as a mother bird which sees its fledgling helpless before a coiling serpent—and as twitteringly nervous—Mrs. Winnicott stood beside her daughter's bed, holding the little white hands that lay so listlessly on the bedspread, reaching mechanically for the phial of sal volatile which stood upon the night-table, then putting it back unopened.

"What is it? What has happened, if you please?" de Grandin cried, placing the medicine cases on a chair and fairly bounding to the bedside.

"I—I don't know—oh, I don't know!" Mrs. Winnicott wailed, wringing her hands helplessly together. "An hour ago—less, maybe—Walter and Rosemary drove up. Walter seemed stunned—almost as though he had been drugged—when he helped her from the car, and said nothing, just half led, half dragged her to the porch, beat upon the front door a moment, then turned and left her. I couldn't sleep, and had been sitting by the window, watching the sky lighten in the east, so I saw them come. When I reached the front door Walter had gone and my poor baby lay there, like this. She's been the same ever since. I've begged her to tell me—to answer me; but—you can see how she is for yourselves!"

"And Walter made no explanation; didn't even stay to help her up to bed?" I asked incredulously.

"No!"

"The young whelp—the scoundrel!" I gritted through my teeth. "If I could get my hands on him, I'd——"

"*Tiens*, my friend, our hands are excellently well filled right here," de Grandin reminded sharply. "Come, attend *Mademoiselle — Madame*, I mean; chastisement of the truant bridegroom may come later, when we are more at leisure."

Quick examination disclosed no physical injury of any kind. Rosemary suffered only from profound shock of some sort, though what the cause might be she was no more able

to tell us than had she been a newborn babe. The Frenchman's diagnosis paralleled mine, and before I could do more than indicate my opinion he had flown to the medicine case, extracted a hypodermic syringe and a phial of tincture digitalis, then prepared an alcohol swab for the patient's arm. With an ease and quickness that bespoke his experience in the field dressing-stations of the war, he drove the needle through the girl's white skin, and the powerful heart-regulant shot home. In a few moments her quick, light breathing became more steady, her piteous moaning less frequent, and the deathly pallor which had disfigured her features gave place to the faint suspicion of a normal color.

"*Bien—très bon!*" He regarded his handiwork complacently. "In a few moments we shall administer a sedative, *Madame,* and your daughter will sleep. From that time forth it is a matter of nursing. We shall procure a skilled attendant at once."

"HULLO, Trowbridge," greeted a familiar voice on the telephone shortly after our return from Mrs. Winnicott's, "d'ye know a fellow named Whitney—Walter Whitney? Seems to me you were his family's physician—this is Donovan talking, over at City Hospital, you know."

"Yes, I know him," I answered grimly. "What——"

"All right, you'd better come over and get him, then. A policeman picked him up a little while ago, nutty as a store full o' cuckoo clocks. Shortly before sunrise this mornin' he was drivin' his car round and round City Hall—seemed to think the Public Square was some sort o' bloomin' merry-go-round, and if the officer hadn't had more sense than most, he'd be decoratin' a cell at some station house now, with a drunk an' disorderly charge against him, instead of bein' here an' keepin' more urgent cases out of a bed in H-3. Come on over and get him like a good fellow, won't you?"

"You mean——"

"I sure do, son. It's not dope an' it isn't booze—the boy's as clean as a ribbon and sound as a hound's tooth, but it's *something,* all right, and I don't mean maybe. I wish you'd come and take him off our hands. This isn't any sanatorium for the idle rich, this is a *bums'* roost, man."

"All right," I promised, turning wearily away. To de Grandin, I announced:

"It seems we'll have to revise our opinion of Walter Whitney. Evidently whatever struck poor little Rosemary hit him, too; he's over in the psychopathic ward of City Hospital, suffering from shock of some sort."

"*Morbleu,* this is tragic, no less!" the little Frenchman exclaimed as we set out to get the stricken bridegroom.

THERE was no doubt Walter Whitney had suffered an ordeal of some kind. His face was serious, preoccupied, as though he sought to catch the lilt of faint, far-away music, or was trying desperately to recall the rime of a snatch of half-remembered verse. When we addressed him he gave back a non-comprehending, vacant-eyed stare, and if we spoke sharply he repeated our words with slow hesitancy, like a child learning to talk or an adult struggling with the intricacies of some foreign language. Once or twice his eyes brimmed with tears, as tears come sometimes at memory of some long-forgotten sorrow, and once he spoke spontaneously.

"What?" I asked, bending down to catch his mumbled answer.

"The—old tale? It's—true—after—all," he muttered slowly, unbelievingly. And when I asked him what he meant he murmured thickly: "God have mercy on us!"

FOR ten long days we labored with the stricken bride and bridegroom. Several times a day de Grandin or I called on them, but it was the little

Frenchman's indomitable will which dragged them back from the lethargy which succeeded the first onset of their strange malady to something near the normal. It was on the eleventh day, while we were visiting Rosemary, that she broke her semi-trance and spoke connectedly.

"Walter and I stole out the back door to where he'd parked his car in the alley while the guests were making merry in the front part of the house," she began with a sad, reminiscent smile, like an old woman recalling the joys of her vanished youth. "We drove to Bladenstown, where Walter had engaged a suite at the Carteret Inn by wire, and he waited in the garden while I fussed about the rooms.

"I'd slipped out of my going-away dress and put on pajamas and kimono, and had finished creaming my face and brushing my hair when——"

She paused, catching her lower lip between her milk-white teeth, like a little girl afraid of what she may say next.

"Yes, *Madame,*" de Grandin prompted softly, his little blue eyes shining, "and then?"

"I heard a footstep on the stairs," she answered, a faint flush mantling her pale cheeks. "I thought it was Walter, and——" Again a little pause, then:

"I switched the lights off quickly and dropped my kimono and slippers as I ran across the room and leaped into the bed. I didn't want him to find me up, you see."

Evidently we were expected to understand, and, though neither of us did, we nodded slowly in concert.

"The steps came up the little hall leading from the stairs to our suite," she went on, "and paused before the door, then went down the hall, a little uncertainly, finally came back, and I could hear someone trying the latch tentatively.

"My heart was beating so it almost shut my breath off, and there was goose-flesh all over me; I felt a sort of feverish-chill inside, but I couldn't help but giggle. Walter was as scared as I. Somehow, one doesn't expect a man to be all cold and trembly in such circumstances, but I knew he was and —and it made me feel happier—more as if we were starting out even, you know.

"Just then the door opened a little, tiny crack, and as it did so, the moon, which had been behind the poplars growing at the lower end of the garden, sailed up into the sky and flooded the room with light. I held my breath, and put out my arms toward Walter, then—*it came in!*"

Her face went white as chalk as she pronounced the words, and we could see the tiny nodules of horripilation form on her forearms.

"It?" De Grandin wrinkled his brows in puzzlement. "What is it you say, *Madame?*"

"It came in—into the parlor of our suite. There was a little, tittering laugh, like the affected snicker of a wicked, senile man—an old roué listening to a nasty, scandalous story, and then I saw it. Oh!" she put her thin, pale hands to her face as though to shut away a sight too terrible for memory, and her narrow, silk-sheathed shoulders shook with sobs of revulsion.

"It wasn't like a man, and yet it was. Not more than four feet tall, very stooped and bandy-legged, with no covering except a thick, horny hide the color of toadskin, and absolutely no hair of any kind upon its body anywhere. About the great, wide grinning mouth there hung a fringe of drooping, wart-like tentacles, and another fringe of similar protuberances dangled from its chin, if it could be said to have a chin, for the head and face were more like those of a horned toad or lizard than anything I can think of. There seemed to be some sort of belt or sash about the creature's waist, and from it hung

a wide-bladed shortsword without a scabbard.

"It stopped just inside the room, and looked around with dreadful, shining eyes that never changed expression, then came slip-slopping on its wide, splayed feet toward the bed where I lay petrified with horror.

"I wanted to scream, to jump up and run, to fling a pillow at the awful nightmare-thing which crept closer and closer, but all I could do was lie there and stare—I couldn't even lower the arms I'd held out to my husband when I thought I heard him at the door.

"When it was almost up to me it spoke. 'Don't 'ee try and get away, my puss,' it said, with a sort of horrible chuckle. ' 'Tis many and many a year since the old one had a man-child to take a bride to wife, and the bargain was only for their bride-night; nothing more. Lie quiet while I warm my chilled face in your bosom, my pretty, for it's been more time than you can know since I've done as much——'

"Then"—she paused a moment, fighting for breath like a winded runner finishing a race—"then it came over to me and put its arms about me—ugh! they were cold as something fished up from the river! —and kissed me—*kissed me on the mouth!*"

Her voice rose to a shrill, thin scream as she finished, and for a moment she gasped weakly, then fell back against her pillows, her slender torso retching with physical sickness induced by the dreadful memory.

I hastened to administer aromatic ammonia, and in a few minutes she regained comparative calm.

"I don't know what happened next," she whispered. "I fainted, and the next I knew I was here in bed, with Mother and the nurse beside me.

"Tell me," she added suddenly, "what's become of Walter? I've been so weak and miserable all the while that I've scarcely noticed his absence; but I haven't seen him once. Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. de Grandin, don't tell me that awful creature—that horrible monster—hurt him—killed—oh, no! That would be too cruel! Don't tell me, if it's so!"

"It is not so, *Madame*," de Grandin assured her gently. "*Monsieur* your husband has suffered severe shock, also, though as yet we do not know what induced it; but we believe he will soon be himself again; then we shall bring him to you."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, sir," she answered, the first smile showing on her pale, wasted face. "Oh, I'm so glad. My Walter, my beloved, is safe!" Clean, cleansing tears, overwrought woman's best restorative, coursed down her cheeks.

"Be of good courage, *Madame*," de Grandin bade. "You have suffered much, but you have youth and love, you have each other; you also have Jules de Grandin for ally. The odds are all in your favor. But of course."

"WELL, what d'ye make of it?" I demanded as we descended the Winnicott front steps. "Sounds to me as if she fell asleep and suffered such a nightmare that it carried over into her conscious mind, and——"

"And *Monsieur* her husband, who has been no less profoundly affected—did he also suffer a realistic *cauchemar* at the same time, perhaps?" broke in the Frenchman. "*Non*, my friend, your theory is untenable. I would it were not; the explanation would provide an easy exit from our difficulties."

I set my lips grimly. "D'ye know what I think?" I answered.

"*Parbleu*, do you?" his elfin grin took the sting from the sarcasm.

"I believe the poor girl was temporarily unbalanced by some dreadfully vivid dream, and when that worthless scoundrel she married realized it, he took her home—returned her like an unprincipled woman

throwing back a piece of merchandise on a shopkeeper's hands!"

"But this so strange malady he suffered—still suffers?" de Grandin protested.

"Is malingering, pure and simple, or his guilty conscience preying on his mind," I returned.

"*Oh, là, là; le bon Dieu* preserve the little patience with which heaven has endowed Jules de Grandin!" he prayed. "My good Trowbridge, my excellent, practical one, ever seeing but so much oil and pigment in a painting, but so many hundredweight of stone in a statue. *Mort d'un coq,* but you annoy me, you vex me, you anger and enrage me—me, I could twist your so stupid neck! What lies behind all this I know no more than you, but may Satan serve me fried with parsley if I traverse Monsieur Robin Hood's barnyard seeking a conventional explanation for something which fairly reeks of the superphysical. No, a reason there is, there must be, but you are as far from seeing it as an Icelander is from hearing the blackbirds whistle in the horse-chestnuts of St. Cloud! Yes."

"Well, where are you going to hunt this supernatural explanation?" I demanded.

"I did not say supernatural," he answered acidly. "Everything is natural, though if we do not know, or if we misread nature's laws, we falsely call it otherwise. Consider: Fifty years ago a man beholding the radio would have called it supernatural, yet the laws of physics governing the device were known as well then as now. But their application had not yet been learned. So in this case. Who—or what—it was Madame Whitney beheld upon her bridal night we do not know, nor do we in anywise know why she should have seen it; but that it was no figment of a dream Jules de Grandin is prepared to wager his far from empty head. Certainly.

"Now, first, we shall interrogate Monsieur Whitney; perhaps he can tell us that which will put us on the proper track. Failing that, we shall make discreet inquiries at the inn where the manifestation was seen. In that way we may acquire information. In any event, we shall not cease to seek until we have found. No, Jules de Grandin is not lightly to be thrown off the trail of ghost or human evil-doer, friend Trowbridge."

"Humph!" I grunted. There seemed nothing else to say.

"*DES bonnes nouvelles, mon ami!*" de Grandin exclaimed. "But yes; certainly; assuredly we bring you great tidings of gladness. *Madame* your wife is most greatly improved, and if you show similar progress we shall take you to her within the week. Come, smile. Is it not wonderful?"

Walter Whitney raised a face which was like a death-mask of joy, and the smile he essayed was sadder than any tears. "I can't see her; I shall never see her again," he answered tonelessly.

"What is it you say? But this is infamous—monstrous!" the Frenchman exploded. "*Madame* your wife, who has but emerged from the valley of death's shadow, desires to see you; *la pauvre, belle créature,* she expected, she deserved happiness and love and tenderness; she has had only sorrow and suffering, and you sit there, *Monsieur,* like a bullfrog upon the marsh-bank, and say you can not see her! It is damnable, no less, *cordieu!*" He fairly sputtered in his fury.

"I know," Whitney answered wearily. "I'm the cause of it all; she'll suffer worse, though, if I see her again."

"What, *cochon!*—you would threaten her, the wife of your bosom?" De Grandin's strong, deceptively slender fingers worked spasmodically.

For an instant faint animation showed in young Whitney's somber, brooding face. "It isn't anything I'd

do to her—I'd give my heart's blood to save her an instant's suffering!—but it's through me, though without my intention, that she's suffered as she has, and any attempt on my part to join her would only renew it: I can't see her, I mustn't see her again—ever. That's final."

"May Jules de Grandin stew everlastingly in hell with Judas Iscariot on his left hand and he who first invented Prohibition on his right if it be so!" the Frenchman cried. "*Lâche*, coward, wife-deserter, attend me: From her parent's arms and from her loving home you took that pure, sweet girl. Before the holy altar of your God and before all men you vowed to love and cherish her for better, for worse, in sickness and in health. Together, beneath the golden beams of the honeymoon, you set forth upon life's pathway. *Ha*, it was most pretty, was it not?" He smiled sarcastically. "Then what? This, *mordieu:* At the inn *Madame* your wife experienced a shock, she became hysterical, temporarily deranged, we will say; it is often so when young girls leave the bridal altar for their husbands' arms. And you, what of you? *Ha*, you, the man on whose lips still clung the lying words you mouthed before the altar, you saw her so piteous condition, and like the poltroon you are, you did return her to her home; yes, to her parent's house; *pardieu*, you took her back as an unprincipled woman returns a damaged gown to the shopman! *Ha*, you decorate your sex, *Monsieur;* I do remove my hat in your so distinguished presence!" Seizing his wide-brimmed Panama, he clapped it on his head, then swept it nearly to the floor in an elaborate parody of a ceremonious bow.

White lines showed in Walter Whitney's face, deep wrinkles of distress cut vertically down his cheeks. "It's not so!" he cried, struggling weakly to rise. "It's a damned, infernal lie! You know it is! Damn you, you slanderous rascal, you wouldn't dare talk so if I had my strength! I tell you, I'm responsible for Rosemary's condition today, though it's no fault of mine. I said I'd give my blood to spare her—good Lord, what do you think this renunciation is costing me? I—oh, you wouldn't understand; you'd say I was crazy if I told you!"

"Your pardon, *mon petit pauvre*," de Grandin answered quickly. "I did but hurt you to be kind, as the dentist tortures for a moment with his drill that the longer agony of toothache may be avoided. You have said what I wished; I shall *not* pronounce you crazy if you tell me all; on the contrary, I shall thank you greatly. Moreover, it is the only way that I can be rendered able to help you and Madame Whitney back to happiness. Come, begin at the beginning, and tell me what you can. I am all attention."

Whitney looked at him speculatively a moment. "If you laugh at me I'll wring your neck, when I get well," he threatened.

"I suppose you and Rosemary and everybody else were justified in thinking all you did of me when I took her home the other morning," he continued, "but I did it only because I knew nowhere else to go, and I knew my brain was going to snap 'most any minute, so I had to get her to a place of safety.

"I don't know whether you know it or not, Dr. Trowbridge," he added, turning to me, "but none of the men in my family that I can remember have ever married."

"Your father——" I began with a smile, but he waved the objection aside.

"I don't mean that. You've known us all; think of my uncles, my cousins, my elder brothers. See what I mean?"

I nodded. It was true. His mother's three brothers had died unmarried; had never, as far as I knew,

even had sweethearts, though they were fine, sociable fellows, well provided for financially, and prime favorites with the ladies. Two of his cousins had perished in the World War, both bachelors; another was as confirmed in celibacy as I; the fourth had recently taken his vows as an Episcopal monk. His brothers, both many years his senior, were still single. No, the score was perfect. Walter was the first male of his blood to take a wife within living memory. But:

"Both your sisters married," I reminded him.

"That's just it; it doesn't affect the women."

"What in the world——" I began, but he turned from me to de Grandin.

"My parents were both past forty when I was born, sir," he explained. "My brothers and sisters were all old enough to have had me for a child, and both the girls were married, with families of their own before I came. I used to wonder why all our men were bachelors, but when I mentioned it, nobody seemed to care to answer. Finally, when I was just through prep school and ready to go to Amherst, my Aunt Deborah took me aside and tried to make it plain.

"Poor old girl, I can see her now, almost ninety years of age, with a chin and nose that almost met and the shrewdest, most knowing eyes I've ever seen in a human face. I used to think the man who illustrated the fairy-tale books got his idea of the witches from looking at her when I was a little tad, and later I regarded her as a harmless old nut who'd rather find the hole than the doughnut any day. Well, she's got the laugh on me from the grave, all right.

" 'You must never think of marrying, Wally,' she told me. 'None of our men can, for it means only wo and calamity, usually death or madness for the wives, if they do. Look at your brothers, your uncles and your cousins; *they'll* never marry; neither must you.'

"Naturally, I asked why. I'd had one or two heavy love affairs during prep days, and was already thinking seriously of settling down and raising a mustache and a family as soon as I graduated from college. Her statement rather seemed to cramp my style.

" 'Because it's a curse put on our family,' she answered. ' 'Way back, so far none of us know just how it happened, or why, one of our ancestors did something so utterly vile and wicked that his blood and his sons' blood has been cursed forever. We've traced our genealogy through the female line for generations, for two generations of the family have never lived to bear the same surname.

" 'See here'—she took me out into the hall where the old Quimper coat of arms hung framed upon the wall—'that's the crest of the ancestor who brought the curse upon us. The family—at least his direct male descendants—died out in England centuries ago and the arms were struck from the rolls of the College of Heralds for want of one to bear them, but the blood's poisoned, and you've got it in your veins. Wally, you must never, never think of marrying. It would be kinder to kill the girl outright, instead!'

"She was so earnest about it that she gave me the creeps, and laughing at her didn't better things.

" 'Once, long ago, so long that I can only remember hearing my parents talk of it when I was a very little girl,' she told me, 'one of our men dared the curse and married. His wife went stark, raving mad on her bridal night, and he lived to be a broken, embittered old man. That's the only instance I know of the rule being broken, but don't *you* break it, Wally, or you'll be sorry; you'll never forgive yourself for what you did to the girl you loved when you married her!'

"Aunt Deborah was dead and in her grave at Shadow Lawns when I came back from college, and Mother had only the vaguest notions of the curse. Like me, she was inclined to regard it as one of the old lady's crack-brained notions, and, though she never actually said so, I think she resented the influence the old girl had in keeping so many of our men single.

"Mother died two years ago, and I've lived here by myself since. Rosemary and I had known each other since the days when I used to scalp her every afternoon and hang her favorite doll in chains each morning, and while we've never really been swethearts in our younger days, we'd always been the best of friends and kept up the old intimacy. Last Decoration Day I was a little late getting out to Shadow Lawns, and when I reached the family plot I met Rosemary coming away. She'd been putting flowers on my parents' graves.

"That really started it. We became engaged last fall, and, as you know, were married this month.

"Oh, Lord," his face went pale and strained as though with bodily torture, "if I'd only known! *If I'd only known!*"

"*Eh bien, Monsieur,* we also desire to know," de Grandin reminded.

"We'd planned everything," Whitney continued. "The house was to be redecorated throughout, and Rosemary and I were going to spend our honeymoon away while the painters were at their work here.

"The night we married we drove to Carteret Inn and I waited in the garden while she unpacked and made her toilet for the night. The blood was pounding at my temples and my breath came so fast it almost smothered me while I strolled about that moonlit garden.

"D'ye remember how you felt sort o' weak and trembly inside the first time you went up to ring a girl's doorbell—the first time you called on your first sweetheart?" he asked, turning a wan smile in my direction.

I nodded.

"That's how I felt that night. I'd been a clean-lived chap, Dr. Trowbridge. I'm not bragging; it just happened so; but that night I thanked God from the bottom of my heart that Rosemary could give me no more than I took to her—there's consolation for all the 'good times' missed in that kind of thought, sir."

Again I nodded, thoroughly ashamed of all the suspicions I'd voiced against the lad.

"I kept looking at my watch, and it seemed to me the thing must have stopped, but at last a half-hour crawled by—it seemed more like half a century. Then I went in.

"Just as I began to mount the stairs I thought I saw a shadow in the upper hall, but when I looked a second time it was gone; so I assumed it had been one of the hotel servants passing on his duties, and paid no more attention. The latch of our door seemed stuck somehow, or perhaps my nervous fingers were clumsy; at any rate, I had some trouble getting in. Then——"

He stopped so long I thought he had repented his decision to take us into his confidence, but at length he finished:

"Then I went in. My God! What a sight! Something like a man, but green all over, like a body that has lain in the river till it's ready to drop apart, was standing by the bed, holding Rosemary in its arms, and nuzzling at her bosom where her pajamas had been torn away with the most horrible, obscene mouth I've ever seen.

"I tried to rush the thing and beat it off, but my limbs were paralyzed; neither arm nor leg could I move. I couldn't even cry out to curse the foul nightmare-goblin that held my wife against its nude, slimy breast and wheezed and snuffled at her as an old,

asthmatic dog might sniff and slaver at a wounded bird.

"At last the horror seemed aware of my presence. Still holding Rosemary in its arms, it lifted its misshapen head and grinned hellishly at me. Its eyes were big as silver dollars, and bright as fox-fire glowing in the marsh at night.

"'I'm come to claim my rights, Sir Guy,' it told me, though why in God's name it should address me so I've no idea. ' 'Tis many a year since last one of your gentle line gave in to me; they've cheated me right handsomely by staying womanless; but you've been good to me, and I thank ye right kindly for it.'

"I stood and stared, petrified with horror, weak with positive physical nausea at very sight of the fetid thing which held my wife, and the monster seemed suddenly to notice me again. "What, still here?' it croaked. 'Be off, ye churl! Have ye no more manners than to stand by staring while your liege lord wages his right? Be off, I say, or there ye'll stand till all is done, nor will ye lift a hand to stay me.'

"But I did lift a hand. The terror which had held me spellbound seemed to melt as I caught a glimpse of Rosemary's white face; and as the awful creature's flat, frog's-claw hands ripped another shred of her nightclothes away, I yelled and charged across the room to grapple with the thing.

"With a dreadful, tittering laugh it dropped Rosemary on the bed and turned to meet my onset, drawing a sort of short, wide-bladed sword from its girdle as it did so. I never had a chance. The slimy, naked monster was shorter by a foot than I, but for all its misshapen deformity it was quick as lightning and tremendously strong. Its arms, too, were half again as long as mine, and before I could land a single blow it hit me on the head with the flat of its sword and floored me. I tried to rise, but it was on me before I could struggle to my knees, beating at my head with its blade, and down I went like a beaten prize-fighter.

"How long I lay unconscious I do not know, but when I came to, the first faint streaks of morning were lighting the room, and I could see almost as plainly as by moonlight. The horrid apparition had vanished, but there was a strong, almost overpowering stench in the room—a stink like the smell of stagnant water that's clogged with drowned and rotting things.

"Rosemary lay half in, half out of the bed, her lips crushed and bruised and a darkened spot upon her nose, as though she had been struck in the face. Her nightclothes were ripped to tatters, the jacket hanging to her shoulders by shreds, the trousers almost ripped away, and there were stains of blood on them.

"I got some water from the bathroom and washed her poor, bruised face and bathed her wrists and temples. Then I found some fresh pajamas in her bag. Presently she waked, but didn't seem to know me. She didn't speak, she didn't move, just lay there in a sort of waking stupor, staring, staring and seeing nothing, and every now and then she'd moan so pitifully it wrung my heart to hear her.

"After trying vainly to revive her for a time I managed to get her clothes on somehow and lugged her downstairs to the car. Nobody was awake at that hour; nobody saw us leave, and I didn't know which way to turn. Bladenstown is strange to me, I didn't know where to look for a doctor, and there was no one to ask. If I had found one, what could I have told him? How could I explain Rosemary's condition on her wedding night? You don't suppose he'd have believed me if I'd told him the truth, do you?

"So I turned back toward Harrisonville and all the time, as I drove, something inside me seemed to say ac-

cusingly: 'It's your fault; it's your fault; this is all your doing. You wouldn't listen to Aunt Deborah; now see what you've brought on Rosemary!'

"'Your fault—your fault—*your fault!*' the humming of my motor seemed to chuckle at me as I drove.

"And it was. Too late I realized how terrible the curse on our family is, and what a dreadful ordeal I'd subjected Rosemary to. My heart was breaking when I reached her mother's house, and I couldn't find the words to tell her what had happened. I only knew I wanted to get away—to crawl off somewhere like a wounded dog and die.

"Then, as I left the Winnicott house and drove toward the center of the city, something seemed to go 'snap' inside my head, and the next I knew you gentlemen had me in hand.

"So now you know why I can never see Rosemary again," he finished. "If I yield to my heart's pleadings and go to her I know I shan't be strong enough to give her up, and rather than bring that thing on her again, I'll let her—and you, and all the world—think what you will of me, and when she sues me for divorce I'll not contest the action.

"Now tell me I'm crazy!" he challenged. "Tell me this is all the result of some shock you can't explain, and that I just imagined it. I don't care what you say—I was there; I saw it, and I know."

"Assuredly you do, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin conceded, "nor do I think that you are crazy, though the good God knows you have admirable excuse if you were. *Non,* I believe you firmly, but your case is not so hopeless as it seems. Remember, Jules de Grandin is with you, and it shall go hard but I shall make a monkey of this so foul thing which had no more discretion than to thrust itself into your bridal chamber. Yes, *pardieu,* I promise it!"

"I'M SORRY for what I said about that boy," I confessed contritely as we left young Whitney's house. "But appearances were certainly against him, and——"

"*Zut,* no apologies, my friend!" de Grandin admonished. "I am glad you lost your temper, for your suspicions, unworthy as they were, did furnish me with the very accusations I needed to sting him from his silence and force from him the explanation which shall aid us in our task."

"Explanation?" I echoed. "I don't see we're much nearer an explanation than we were before. It's true Walter's story corroborates Rosemary's, but——"

"But I damn think I see the glimmer of light ahead," the Frenchman cut in with a smile. "Consider: Did not you catch the two small clues Monsieur Walter let drop?"

"No, I can't say I did," I returned. "As far as I was concerned the whole business was an unrelated hodge-podge of horror, meaningless as the vagaries of a nightmare."

"What of the remarks made by the visitant concerning its having come to claim its rights?" he asked. "Or, by example, the odd manner in which it addressed the young Walter as Sir Guy? Does not that suggest something to you?"

"No, it doesn't."

"*Eh bien,* I should have known as much," he returned resignedly. "Come, if you have time, accompany me to New York. I think our friend, Dr. Jacoby, may be able to enlighten us somewhat."

"Who is he?"

"The curator of mediæval literature at the *Musée Métropolitaine. Parbleu*"—he gave a short chuckle—"that man he knows every bit of scandalous gossip in the world, provided it dates no later than the Fifteenth Century!"

THE long summer twilight was deepening into darkness as we entered the walnut-paneled, book-

lined office of Dr. Armand Jacoby in the big graystone building facing Fifth Avenue.

The learned doctor appeared anything but the profound savant he was, for he was excessively fat, almost entirely bald, and extremely untidy. His silk shirt, striped with alternate bands of purple and lavender, was open at the throat, his vivid green cravat was unknotted but still encircling his neck, and a thick layer of pipe-ashes besprinkled his gray-flannel trousers. "Hullo, de Grandin," he boomed in a voice as big and round as his own kettle-like abdomen, "glad to see you. What's on your mind? You must be in some sort of trouble, or you'd never have made the trip over in this infernal heat."

"*Tiens,* my friend," the Frenchman answered with a grin, "your perception is as bounteous as your hair!" Then, sobering quickly, he added: "Do you, by any happy chance, know of a mediæval legend, well-authenticated or otherwise, wherein some knight, probably an Englishman, swore fealty to some demon of the underworld, or of the ancient heathen days, giving him *le Droit du Seigneur?*"

"What was that?" I interrupted before Jacoby could reply.

The doctor looked at me as a teacher might regard a singularly backward pupil, but his innate courtesy prompted his answer.

"It was the right enjoyed by feudal lords over the persons and property of their people," he told me. "In mediæval times society was divided into three main classes, the nobility, with which the clergy might be classed, the freemen, and the serfs or villeins. The freemen were mostly inhabitants of towns, occasionally they were the yeomanry or small farmers, while the serfs or villeins were the laborers who cultivated the land. One of the peculiarities of these poor creatures' condition was they were in no circumstances allowed to move from the estate where they lived, and when the land was sold they passed with it, just like any fixture. The lord of the manor had practically unlimited power over his serfs; he might take all they possessed and he might imprison them at his pleasure, for good reason or for no reason. When they died, whatever miserable property they had been able to accumulate became his instead of passing to their children. Even the burghers and yeomen were under certain duties to their lord or *seigneur.* They had to pay him certain moneys on stated occasions, such as defraying the expenses of knighting his eldest son, marrying his eldest daughter, of bailing him out when he was captured by the enemy. These rights were properly grouped under the term *Droit du Seigneur,* but in later times the expression came to have a specialized meaning, and referred to the absolute right enjoyed by many barons of spending the first night of marriage with the bride of any of his liegemen, occupying the hymeneal chamber with the bride while the bridegroom cooled his heels outside the door. Because of this it is probable that a third of the commoners' children in mediæval Europe had gentle blood in their veins, although, of course, their social status was that of their mothers and putative fathers. The French and German peasants and burghers submitted, but the English yeomen and townsmen put one over on the nobles when they devised a law of inheritance whereby estates descended to the youngest, instead of the eldest son. You'll find it all in Blackstone's *Commentaries,* if you care to take the time."

"But——"

Dr. Jacoby waved my question aside with a waggle of his fat hand and turned directly to de Grandin. "It's an interesting question you raise," he said. "There are a dozen or more legends to that effect, and in Scotland and northern England there are several castles where the progeny of those

demons who exercised their *Droit du Seigneur* are said to dwell in secret dungeons in a kind of limited immortality. There's one Scottish castle in particular where the head of the house is supposed to take the heir-apparent into his confidence upon his becoming of age, tell him the story of the family scandal and give him the key to the dungeon where his half-man, half-demon relative is cooped up. No one but the head of the family and his heir are supposed to have these keys, and only they are permitted to see the monstrosity. There's a pleasant little story of the French wife of the Scottish laird who let her curiosity get the better of her, abstracted the dungeon key from her husband's dispatch case and went down to see for herself. They found her wandering about the cellar next morning, her hair snow-white and her mind a blank. She ended her days in a lunatic asylum."

"Very good," de Grandin nodded. "But have you any memoranda of such a compact being made and carried out for several generations?"

"H'm," Dr. Jacoby caressed his fat chin with the fat thumb and forefinger of his wide, white hand. "N-o, I can't say I have. Usually these stories are buried so deep under additional legends that it's practically impossible to get at the root-legend, but—hey, wait a minute!" His big eyes lighted with enthusiasm behind the pebbles of his thick-lensed spectacles. "There is an old tale of that kind; Queberon, or Quampaire, or some such name was the man's, and the demon was called——" He paused, pondering a moment, then: "No, it's no use, I can't remember it; but if you'll give me forty-eight hours I'll dig it out for you."

"Oh, my supreme, my superb, my so magnificent Jacoby!" de Grandin answered. "Always are you to be depended on. Your offer is more than satisfactory, my old one, and I am certain you are on the right track, for the modernized style of the name I have in mind is Quimper."

"Humph, that's not so modern," Jacoby answered. "I shouldn't be surprized if it's the original patronymic."

Two days later a thick envelope arrived for de Grandin, and my excitement was almost equal to his as he slit the flap and unfolded several sheets of closely written foolscap.

"The legend you spoke of," Jacoby wrote, "is undoubtedly that of Sir Guy de Quimper—probably pronounced 'Kam-pay' and differently spelled in the Eleventh Century, since there was no recognized system of orthography in those days—who was supposed to have made a bargain with a North England demon in return for his deliverance during the battle of Ascalon. I've tried to modernize a monkish account of the deal; perhaps you'll learn what you wish from it, but I must remind you that those old monks were never the ones to spoil a good story for the truth's sake, and when sufficient facts were not forthcoming, they never hesitated to call on their imaginations."

"The warning was unnecessary," de Grandin laughed, "but we shall see what *Monsieur l' Historien* has to say, none the less."

"Pray ye for daughters, oh ye womenfolk of Quimper, and ask the Lord of His mercy and loving-kindness to grant ye bring no man-children into the world, for of a surety there rests upon the house of Quimper, entailèd on the male line, a curse the like of which was never known before, and, *priedieu*, may not be known again till the heavens be rolled up like a scroll and all the world stand mute before our God His judgment seat.

"For behold, it was a filthy act wrought by Sir Guy of eld, and with his words of blasphemy he bound forever the men of all his line to suffer

through their womenfolk a dole and drearihead most dreadful.

"It was upon the day when our good Lord Godfrey of Bouillon, most prowessed of our Christian knights, with good Sir Tancred and their little host of true believers smote the Paynim horde upon the plains of Ascalon and scattered them like straw before the winter blast that Guy of Quimper and his men-at-arms rode forth to battle for the Holy Sepulcher. Anon the battle waxed full fierce, and though our good knights rode down the infidel as oxen tread the grain upon the threshing-floor, nathless Sir Guy and his companions were separated from the main host and one by one the Christian soldiers watered the field of battle with their blood.

"And now cometh such a press of Paynim warlings that Sir Guy is fairly unseated from his charger and hurled upon the earth, whereat nigh upon a hundred of the infidel were fain to do him injury, and but that the stoutness of his armor held them off were like to have slaughtered him.

"Thrice did he struggle to arise, and thrice his weight of foemen bore him down, until at last, being sore beset and fearing that his time was come, he called aloud upon St. George, saying: 'Ho, good Messire St. George, thou patron of true knights of Britain, come hitherward and save thy servant who is worsted by these pestilent believers in the Antichrist!'

"But our good St. George answered not his prayer, nor was there any sign from heaven.

"Then my Sir Guy called right lustily upon St. Bride, St. Denis and St. Cuthbert, but the sainted ones heard not his prayer, for there were one and twenty thousand men embattled in the cause that day, and one man's plaint might soothly go unheard.

"Sir Guy of Quimper lifted up his voice no more, but resigned himself to Paradise, but an infidel's steel pierced through his visor bars, and he bethought him of the pleasant land of England which he should never see again, and of the gentle lady whose tears and prayers were for his safety. Then did he swear a mighty oath and cry aloud: 'If so be none will hear my prayer from heaven, then I renounce and cast them off as they have cast off me, and to the Saxon godlings of my forebears I turn. Ho, ye gods and goddesses of eld, who vanished from fair England at the coming of the Cross, hear one in whose veins courses Saxon blood, and deliver him from his plight. Name but your boon and ye shall have it, for I am most grievously afeared my hour draweth nigh, unless ye intervene!'

"And forthwith came a rustling o'er the plain, and from the welkin rode a shape which eye of man had not seen for many a hoary age. All nakedly it rode upon a naked horse, and at its heels came troops of hounds which ran like little pigs behind their dam, and in its hand it bore a short-sword of the ancient shape, the same the Saxon serfs brandished impotently against the chivalry of our good Duke of Normandy.

"'Who calls?' cried out the fearsome shape, 'and what shall be the guerdon of my service?'

"'Tis Guy of Quimper calls,' Sir Guy made answer, 'and I am sore beset. Do but deliver me from out the heathen's hand, and thy fee shall be whatsoe'er thou namest.'

"Then up there rose a monstrous wind, as cold as bleak November's, and on the wintry blast rode Dewer, Old Dewer, the ghostly huntsman of the North, all followed by his troop of little dogs, and with his good sword he smote them right and left, so that heads and heads fell everywhere, and scarce a Paynim stayed to do him battle.

"And when the heathen host was fled Old Dewer unhorsed himself and leaned above Sir Guy and raised him up and set him on his feet. But so fearsome was his aspect and so ill-

favored his face that my Guy of Quimper was like to have fallen down again in a swound at sight of it, but that he thought him of his oath, and making a brave face spake forth: 'Name now thy boon, for by the eyes of Sainted Agnes, well and truly hast thou earned it.'

"Whereat Old Dewer laughed full frightfully and said: 'Upon thy two knees now kneel, Sir Guy of Quimper, and claim me as thy overlord and name thyself my vassal liegeman, holding thy demesne as of fee from out my hand, upon condition that thy line shall give me seigneur's rights upon their bridal night, and this accord shall bind thee and thy heirs male forever unless such time shall rise as a woman of thy house shall stare me in the face and bid me hence from out her bower, which time I trow shall not be soon.' Thereat he laughed again, and the joints of Sir Guy's limbs were loosed and scarcely could he kneel erect before Old Dewer and place his hands between the monster's what time he spake the words of fealty.

"Thus came Sir Guy's deliverance from the Turk, but at such cost of tears as might almost wash out that woful wight his guilt. For on returning to his home Sir Guy found there a son whose name was likewise callèd Guy, and when his marriage banns were published some one and twenty years hence, and with singing and dancing and all glad minstrelsy the bride was put to bed, lo, forth from out the empty air came Dewer, Old Dewer of the North, and claimed his right of seigneury. And forth from out her bower came the bride upon the morn, her cheeks all stained with tears and her hair unloosed, and in her eyes the light of madness. Nor did she ever speak sane word again.

"And when the time was come that young Sir Guy's junior brother was to wed, Old Dewer rode forth from out the North to claim his fee, and thus for generation unto generation came he forth whenever and wherever the wedding bells did chime for one who had but one small drop of Quimper's blood within his veins. But the women molested he not, for it was not according to the compact that the female line be cursed.

"But those of Sir Guy's line who knew the curse forbore to wed, and some went into Holy Church, and by their prayers and ceaseless lamentations sought surcease of the curse, and others remained virgin all their days, according to the counsel of their elders, thus cheating that old fiend whose name is Dewer, surnamed the Huntsman.

"And some there were who taught their brides the words of power which should win freedom from the curse, but when the time was come they all cried craven, for where beneath the star-jeweled canopy of heaven dwells a woman with resolution to stare Old Dewer in the face and bid him hie himself away?

"And so throughout the length of years Old Dewer cometh ever, and when the womenfolk would drive him from their chambers their tongues cleave to the roofs of their mouths and they are speechless while he works his evil will, and never yet has there been found a bride who can retain her senses when from his foul mouth Old Dewer presses kisses on her lips.

"Pray ye for daughters, oh ye womenfolk of Quimper, and ask the Lord of His great mercy and loving-kindness to grant that ye bring no man-children into the world, for of a surety there rests upon the men of Quimper a curse the like of which was never known before."

"I MAY add," Jacoby's letter ended, "that I consider the story entirely apocryphal. There seems no doubt that the Quimper family once existed in the north of England, and it is highly probable some representative of the house went to the Crusades, since practically every able-bodied

man was drained from Europe during that prolonged period of hysteria. There are also semi-authentic data showing that one or more ladies of the house went mad, but whether their seizures dated from their wedding nights or not I can not say. The chances strongly favor the theory that the monkish chronicler seized upon the incidents of the brides' insanity to point a moral and adorn a tale, and for lack of an authentic one, provided the story from his own imagination. There was at one time a decided movement among the English peasantry toward the worship, or at least a half-affectionate tolerance, of the old Saxon gods and goddesses, and it may well be the old monk invented the tale of Sir Guy's compact with 'Old Dewer' in order to frighten off any who expressed an opinion that the old gods might not have been the demons the Christian priests were wont to paint them.

"I might also add the Quimper arms were formally struck from the rolls two centuries or more ago because of failure of heirs in the house. Whether, as the old monk intimates, this was due to most of the men taking holy orders or remaining single in secular life, there is no way of telling. I favor the theory that one or more of the numerous plagues which swept England and the Continent in the old days, coupled with the hazards of war and the sea, may have wiped the family out."

"*Eh bien*, my friend, would you not open wide those great pop-eyes of yours, could you but know what we do?" de Grandin exclaimed as he finished the letter. "*Parbleu*, those old friars, they were great hands at dressing the truth in strange garments, but this one, I damn think, has recited no more than the barest of bare facts."

"All right," I agreed, "suppose he did. While I think Dr. Jacoby is unquestionably right in his surmises, suppose we grant your premises for the sake of argument, where are we? If this mysterious goblin called Dewer actually pursues all male members of old Sir Guy's family, no matter how distantly they are related to him, and frightens them and their brides into fits, what are we to do about it? Is there any way we can prevent it?"

"You ask me?" he demanded sharply. "Pains of a rheumatic bullfrog, I shall say there is! Does not the never-enough-to-be-blessed old nameless monk make plain the formula in his chronicle? Does he not tell us the proviso Old Dewer himself made, that if a bride accosted by him should look him in the face and bid him be off, off he will go, and nevermore return? Name of a little blue man, can anything be simpler?"

"It certainly can," I answered. "In the first place, Rosemary Whitney was frightened almost out of her mind by the specter, or whatever it was she saw on her wedding night. We've had a man-sized job pulling her through this illness, and a second shock like that—even the bare suggestion that she face the ordeal again—might do such serious injury to her nervous system that she'd never recover.

"In the second place, if there *is* such a thing as this old goblin, and if it's as horrible to look at as Rosemary and Walter say, she'd faint dead away the moment she saw it, and never be able to say her little piece. No, old man, I'm afraid things aren't as simple as you seem to think."

"*Ah bah*," he held his arm up for my inspection, "has Jules de Grandin nothing up his sleeve besides his elbow, my friend? I tell you in my bag I have a trick still left which shall make a *sacré* singe of this Monsieur Dewer and send him home a wiser and much sadder demon. Yes; I have said it."

"What do you propose doing?"

"That, my friend, I shall show when the appointed time arrives. Meanwhile, let us labor with all our strength to restore Monsieur and Ma-

dame Whitney, that they may face their ordeal with calmness. Thus far their improvement has been most gratifying. Within a week we should be ready for the great experiment."

"Suppose they fail and have another relapse?" I queried. "Remember, de Grandin, this is the health and sanity of two people with which you're gambling."

"Suppose you cease from croaking like a raven suffering with laryngitis," he countered with a grin. "My throat is parched with answering your so pig-stupid objections. A glass of brandy—not too small—if you will be so kind."

Beyond the row of rustling poplars growing at the garden's lower boundary the moon sailed serenely in the zenith, gilding hedge and path and formal flowerbed with argent. Still farther off, where the river ran between lush banks of woodland, a choir of little frogs—"peepers"—sang serenades to the green-skinned ladies of their choice, and in an ancient cherry tree, so old it bore no fruit, though still put out its blossoms in the spring, a night-bird twittered sleepily.

"Ah, you are brave, *Madame,*" de Grandin affirmed, "brave like the blessed Jeanne herself, and I do most solemnly declare that you shall conquer splendidly tonight."

Rosemary lifted starry eyes to his. Preceding us to the suite in Carteret Inn—the same rooms where she and Walter had lodged so happily a month before—she had doffed her traveling-dress and put on a *robe de nuit* of pale green crêpe, drawing a kimono of oyster-white embroidered with gold over it. Her face was pallid as the silk of her robe, but lines of determination such as only a woman casting dice for love and happiness can know showed about her mouth as she faced Jules de Grandin. "I'm terribly afraid," she confessed in a voice that shook with nervousness, "but I'm going to do everything you tell me to, *just* as you tell me, for it's not only me I'm fighting for, it's Walter and his happiness, and, Dr. de Grandin, I love him so!"

"*Précisément,*" the little Frenchman took her hand in his and raised it to his lips, "exactly, *Madame,* quite so; and I believe that all I say is for the best. Now, if you please, compose yourself — so — that is excellent." From underneath his jacket he slipped a small silver-framed photograph of Walter Whitney and set it upright on the bureau before the seated girl. "Regard it fixedly, *Madame,*" he bade; "gaze on the features of your beloved and think how much you love him—exclude all other thoughts from your mind."

It was as if he had ordered a starving man to eat, or commanded one rescued from the burning desert to drain a cup of cool water. The soft, adoring look which only women wholly slaves of love can give crept into the girl's eyes as she stared intently at the picture.

"Excellent," he murmured, "*très excellent!*" For upward of a minute he stood there, smiling at her as though she had been his younger sister then, very softly, he commanded:

"*Madame,* you are tired, you are fatigued, you much desire sleep. Sleep —sleep, Madame Whitney; I, Jules de Grandin, order it!

"Sleep—sleep——" softly as a summer breeze, soothingly as a mother's lullaby, his murmured admonition was repeated again and yet again.

Rosemary took no seeming notice of his words; her shining, sweet blue eyes stayed fixed upon her husband's photograph, but slowly, almost before I realized it, her white, blue-veined lids lowered, and she leaned back in her chair.

For a minute or two de Grandin regarded her solicitously, then: "Madame Whitney!" he called softly.

No answer.

(Continued on page 138)

The BAGHEETA

by Val Lewton

THE church bells of Ghizikhan pealed out slow, lazy music to mark the end of the morning prayer. Kolya turned his head idly to look at the village. From his vantage-point in the open porch of the armorer's shop where he was engaged in polishing the swords and other weapons which his uncle had chosen to place on display that day, Kolya could see the entire length of Ghizikhan's single street. It was early and the long shadows of the Caucasian peaks fell like dark, irregular bars across the valley. Only through the gap between Mount Elbruz and the volcanic peak of Silibal came sunlight, falling squarely upon the village. In this pleasant light the folk of Ghizikhan went about their early morning tasks. At the well the maidens jostled one another, giggling as they drew up water. Kolya's eyes, although he had just grown to manhood, avoided this group, but turned with interest upon the shepherds who were having a last, long draft at the inn door before going on to relieve the men who had guarded the flocks through the night hours.

It was a sight that Kolya could see any time, and, yawning, he turned back to the task in hand, the scouring of a new sword blade with water and white sand. Diligently he worked the scouring-cloth back and forth, his long, fair hair falling down over his forehead as he bent to the task. Of a

"The eyes were yellow, and burning as the burnished brass of the altar rail."

sudden a cry went up at the other end of the village, and Kolya's head was upflung as if by magic.

Two men were running toward the inn. Between them they carried a shapeless bundle. Kolya could only catch the colors of the object—red and white. As they ran they cried out: "A Bagheeta! A Bagheeta! We have seen her!"

Kolya identified the burden which they carried between them. It was a sheep, torn to death by a panther. Dropping the scouring-cloth, Kolya ran to where a knot of men had gathered about the two shepherds. He forced his way toward the center of the crowd until he could hear the words of one of the men: "——black as wood from a fire, bigger than any natural leopard—a monster, I tell you! Varla and I came upon her at her meal. With my own eyes I saw her—you can measure for yourselves

—from here to here," the shepherd indicated a huge, bloody rent in the flank of the slain sheep, "she took one mouthful. A real Bagheeta—I swear it!"

The men around him crowded closer to see the evidence. It was true; an enormous mouth had made those long gashes in the carcass.

The *hetman* of Ghizikhan, pulling at his virgin beard, questioned the shepherd: "Fool, what did you do? Did you let the beast escape so that it may enjoy such a feast as this from our table whenever he wills it?"

The shepherd protested: "It was a real Bagheeta, I tell you, *Hetman!* What could we do? Varla shot at her, but you know that no bullet can harm a Bagheeta—not even a silver bullet. She just snarled at us and walked away."

"Walked away?" the *hetman's* tones were dubious.

"Yes, *Hetman,* I have said it so: walked away, just turned and walked away. She knew we couldn't hurt her. Both Varla and I are married men, you know!"

"Aye, *Hetman,* I believe them." It was Davil who spoke, Davil the old minstrel, who in his youth had killed a Bagheeta. "This Bagheeta must be the same leopard we hunted all these last three days. If it had been a real leopard its skin would have been drying on the walls of your house by now, *Hetman,* but only a pure youth who can resist her blandishments can kill a Bagheeta. You must select a pure youth to hunt down this were-beast—a real St. Vladimir, pure of heart as a virgin."

"Nonsense! These are old wives' tales, falser than your rimes, Davil," Rifkhas the huntsman, whose very garments smelled always of the forest, spoke out heatedly. "What is this beast, you say—a black leopard? To the east, beyond Elbruz, they are as common as black crows are in our land! It was the hard winter and the heavy snows which have driven them here. One good shot from my old rifle and your Bagheeta will be deader than the sheep he's killed. Do not forget, Davil, that I too have killed one of these black kittens, and with a rifle and a lead ball—I saw no signs of magic or sorcery.

"I have grown sick of these old lies which send our young men frightened into the forest. Believe me, it is safer in the forest than before the coffee-pots in the *khan.* King God has made man lord above the beasts and they all fear him."

But by now the women of Ghizikhan had swarmed to the scene of the excitement, and their loud outcries drowned out the old huntsman's logic. Shrill voices explained the myth to those too young to know the significance of a black leopard among the spotted ones.

It is a were-beast, they said, half leopard and half woman, the reincarnation of a virgin who has died from wrongs inflicted upon her by sinful men, and who comes again to the world so that she may prey upon the flocks of the sinful. Only a pure youth, one who has lain clean and alone, can hope to slay the mystic beast. He must ride out against the Bagheeta with only a sword at his side and a prayer to King God upon his lips. The Bagheeta, so the women said, will change at his coming into a beautiful woman and attempt to coerce him into an embrace. If she is successful, if the youth kisses her, his life is forfeited. Changing again into a black leopard, the Bagheeta will tear him limb from limb. But, if he remain stedfast in his purity, then surely will he slay the beast.

KOLYA listened eagerly. It was not the first time he had heard the legend. When they had done talking he looked again at the dead sheep. The bloody, mangled flesh, bearing clear marks of the enormous fangs which had rent it so hideously, sent little shivers up his spine. He had

often heard Davil sing his song of the slaying of the Bagheeta, and standing in the warm sunlight, Kolya grew cold thinking on the dark forest and the dark beast, only its golden eyes visible in the night. He could see vividly the heavy, crushing paws, the curving claws, the red and rending mouth.

Suddenly the *hetman's* voice rang clearly above the chatter of the women: "Who among the *Jighitti*—the good, brave horsemen of our village—is pure of heart and free of sin? Let him stand forward, sword in his right hand!"

A silence fell upon the villagers, and all eyes were turned, first to the face of one youth and then to the face of another. All upon whom the eyes of the villagers fell turned blood-red and averted their faces.

The *hetman* grew impatient. He began to call the young men by name: "Rustumsal? What! And you but sixteen! Fie upon the women of Ghizikhan! Valodja? Shame! Badyr? Shamyl? Vanar?"

All shook their heads.

Then Kolya, his heart pounding with excitement, stepped forward. In his right hand he held his sword, a silent declaration of his intention. Behind him he could hear his mother shrilling: "*Hetman*, he is too young! It is but yesterday that he rode in the *Jigitovka*. Only two days has he worked as a man among men."

The *hetman* paid no attention to her.

Bending forward so that he might look into Kolya's eyes, he asked: "How old are you?"

Kolya answered sturdily: "Sixteen."

"And you have never laid yourself down beside a woman, nor lusted after her with your eyes?"

"No," said Kolya.

The *hetman* doffed his karakul *chapka* and with it still clasped in his hand, pointed to Kolya. A shout went up. Kolya the orphan, nephew of the armorer, had been chosen to hunt down the Bagheeta.

An hour later the men of the village, accoutered as if for war or holiday, rode out from Ghizikhan in a long cavalcade. Kolya, dressed in his best *kaftan* of Burgundy-colored silk, a sleek black *chapka* set jauntily on his head, and wreaths of flowers about his horse's neck, rode at their head. At his side hung the best sword from his uncle's shop. The Silver Maid, his uncle called it, and for no price would he sell it, neither to prince nor commoner, saying always: "Only by the grace of King God was I able to forge such a sword. One can not sell God's gifts for gold."

Beside Kolya rode the *hetman*, and behind them the two old enemies, Davil the minstrel and Rifkhas the huntsman, wrangling as they rode.

"I have lived in the woods my whole life," the huntsman was saying, "and not one, but many of these Bagheetas have I seen killed with bullets. The Russians pay well for their black skins."

Davil silenced his arguments with a burst of song:

"I ride beneath the silver stars,
All in my war array;
I ride beneath the silver stars
To break Bagheeta's sway.

"The stars are bright and bright am I
Clad in my war array.
The land about does gloomy lie,
And Bagheeta's sway.

"I ride with flowers in my hair
And grim sword at my side,
Among the youths I am most fair
And in war foremost ride.

"To me unknown a maiden's wiles:
For see, my heart is pure.
God looks upon my head and smiles:
For see, my heart is pure."

"Blah!" said Rifkhas, spurring his horse a bit so as to catch up with Kolya and leave Davil to ride by him-

self, singing the song which he had composed many years ago in celebration of his own victory over a Bagheeta.

Kolya heard the song behind him go on and on as they rode forward to where the shepherds had seen the leopard.

"Unfeared by me the Deva's call,
The war's grim chance of death,
But here soft footsteps thud and fall,
And quickly comes my breath."

The lad shuddered. He could well imagine the sinuous body of the beast, black as the night it walked through, creeping through the tree trunks in the forest. How dark the forest would be after the moon had gone down! Kolya's horse quivered. It was as if his master's agitation had been conveyed to her too, and that she also knew of the trial ahead of them.

Davil's song went on:

"Of death alone I have no fear,
Nor yet of sword hurt deep,
But now a silent move I hear,
From darkness gold eyes peep.

"My brave horse trembles in his fear,
And tighter grows my rein.
Somewhere from night two gold eyes peer
And mark his frightened pain."

A restive horse in the darkness of the midnight forest; a silent and unseen foe, waiting to leap from ambush, to strike one down with huge paws, to rend one with enormous teeth; Kolya could almost smell the fetid, hot breath which was to issue from the gaping jaws. Yet all this must be true; had not the minstrel killed just such a beast in his youth? Was not this the very song inspired by the feat? Kolya gazed nervously into the green depths of the forest, crowding in upon the trail. Somewhere in its fastnesses was the Bagheeta, crouched, waiting, confident in its supernatural powers.

Rifkhas' voice was speaking to his ear: "I'm sorry that they're not letting you carry a gun, lad. You could wait for the Bagheeta by the water hole. He must drink after his kill. Didst ever note how the cats go to the water butt when they have eaten a rat in the granary? These leopards, black or spotted, are but big cats; they too must drink after they eat. You could shoot the beast easily if the light were good. But these fools, full of old wives' tales, they make it difficult for you. When the good King God has given us gunpowder, what sense is there to send you into the forest with but a sword in your hand? Likewise, when God gives mankind a full moon to hunt by, why in the name of the Seven Peris must they make you wait until the moon has set before you go a-hunting? Why? Because old women like Davil are frightened of the dark, and they would have you be frightened also. Have no fear! There is no beast nor were-beast that will not run from a man. Have no fear, Kolya. I, who have been a huntsman for thirty years, tell you that."

From behind them came the voice of the other old man. He had changed his tune. It was no longer slow, measured and fearsome, the words filled with dread. It came forth exultantly, as if he had just conquered fear. He sang:

"But now I tremble once again,
For here a fair maid comes.
I tremble with no thought of pain
For here a fair maid comes.

"Her lips are scarlet pomegranates,
Her cheeks like Kavkas' snows,
Her eyes are tense as one who waits
For sounds of ringing blows.

"Her speech is all of lovely things
That are in other climes,
Of butterflies with silver wings
And bells with silken chimes.

"She lifteth up her laughing mouth
And I bend down my own."

Davil's voice fell. Deep and fearsome it pounded against Kolya's ears:

"What is this chill wind from the south?
This noise of bone on bone?"

Kolya's heart skipped a beat. What if he were to have no warning? What if he were to be so entranced by the Bagheeta's charms that he were to kiss her?

Davil's chant answered the question for him:

"I fear, I fear and gaze at her
Who looks with such a mien;
I fear, I fear and strain from her
Whose yellow eyes are keen.

"Out sword! Out sword! Bagheeta's eyes
Look now into your own.
Out sword! Out sword! He only dies
Who must the kiss atone.

"With tooth and claw Bagheeta flies
Straight at my armored throat,
And now so close his yellow eyes
That I have falsely smote——"

Kolya's imagination conjured up the gleaming eyes, the hot breath of the beast, its claws sinking into his shoulder. He could feel the sense of helplessness as he was torn from the saddle—the weight of the giant cat upon his body.

Rifkhas' cranky voice, speaking in the calming tones of prose, allayed his fears.

"I'd like to have your chance at this beastie, Kolya," Rifkhas was saying. "One black pelt like that would supply me with wine and caresses for an entire year—aye, even an old fellow like myself could buy the soft arms of women with the price of such a pelt. It's a rare chance you have. If only these fools would let you go on foot. You can't hunt leopards on horseback. Why, the sound of your horse's hoofs will echo for miles about. Get off your horse and creep to the water hole, being careful to see that he doesn't get the wind of you; that's the only way you'll get close enough to Master Bagheeta to kill him with a sword.

"Mind what I tell you, Kolya, and forget all these old women who'd tell you that a leopard can change into a woman just because it happens to be black instead of spotted. Mind what I tell you, Kolya, and with the money you get for the pelt you can set up an armorer's shop of your own."

Behind him, Kolya could hear Davil still singing, describing his own encounter with the dread and mystic beast long, long ago. The fierce half-joy of the conflict and the anguish of those long-healed wounds were in the voice of the old minstrel as he sang:

"Deep, deep I strike, again, again;
Deep do his talons rend.
I am oblivious of my pain
And fast my blows descend.

"With horrid shriek he falls aback,
And now my sword is free.
Again he leapeth to attack,
But now my sword is free.

"Half-way in air the leaping beast,
The cleaving sword, have met;
Now may the herdsmen joyful feast,
For sword and beast have met!"

"*STOI!*" The *hetman's* command cut short both Davil's song and the movement of the cavalcade. The men grouped themselves about the leader as he explained to them how they could best aid Kolya in his adventure. They had arrived at the copse where the Bagheeta had been seen, he told them, and they would now surround the place in such a way as to turn back the Bagheeta if he, sensing Kolya's innocence, were to attempt an escape. None of the men, he warned them, must dare to engage the creature. This was safe only for Kolya, who was pure of heart.

With the point of his spear the *hetman* drew a rough map in the sand showing the copse and the hollow between two steep cliffs in which it was situated. To each man he designated a certain post at which to watch. He told them that if the Bagheeta approached their positions they must raise up their swords with the cross-like hilts uppermost and loudly sing the hymn of Saint Ivan. Thus, and thus only, could they turn the were-beast back.

At a word from their leader the men galloped off, shouting, to their

positions. Only Davil and Rifkhas remained with Kolya and the *hetman* to wait for the coming of night and the dark of the moon.

It was still late afternoon and, although a pale slice of luminous white moon already rode high in the heavens—sure indication that it would set early—Kolya and the men with him still had a long while to wait before he could ride forth in search of the Bagheeta. Davil was all for passing the time in prayer and the singing of songs, but Rifkhas brought forth an earthen jug of wine and a pack of greasy playing-cards. Soon the three grown men were hard at it, playing one game of cards after another.

Kolya was left to his own devices. He fussed with his horse, watering it at the brook and removing the bridle so that it could graze at will. This took only a short time, and then Kolya was again left with nothing to occupy him but his own fears of the night's trial.

He turned his attention to the copse before him. It was dark with the shadows of the larch and fir trees growing on either side of the brook. This stream had, in the course of the centuries, cut itself a hard bed through the solid rock. Its either bank was precipitous. No animal, Kolya thought to himself, could drink from the stream unless somewhere there was a cleft in the rocky banks. If he were to follow Rifkhas' advice he would have to find such a spot where the leopard could come to drink and there await the Bagheeta's coming.

"But, there will be little need to find the Bagheeta," he reasoned. "She will come creeping upon me and, when she divines that I am pure of heart and have no knowledge of women, then she will turn herself into a maiden, and so lure me to my death."

ON WHISPERING feet, darkness came stealing into the little glen in which they had halted. The beech leaves, quivering in the evening wind, lisped a plaintive song of nervous fear to Kolya's heart. The same breeze, straying through the pine boughs, struck deep soughing chords. Then, as the sun finally set, plunging the land into intense darkness, the evening noises quieted. Robbed of light by which to continue their card game, the three older men sat quietly. Even the horses ceased their trampling and champing in the place where they had been tethered. A cloud was over the slim, silver moon, shaped ominously, Kolya imagined, like a Persian dagger.

Some current of the upper air swept the cloud from before the moon's face. The *hetman,* looking up, remarked that the moon would set in another hour.

Kolya walked to where he had tied his horse. He saddled the animal carefully, glad to crowd fear out of his mind with activity. Putting his knee sharply against his mount's belly, Kolya jerked the girth tight. Then he bridled the horse, feeling with anxious fingers in the darkness to see that the cheek strap was properly set. When he had done all this he led the beast to where the *hetman,* Davil and Rifkhas sat about a tiny fire that they had kindled, more for light than for warmth.

The *hetman* lectured him: "Pray earnestly, Kolya. Ask forgiveness for your sins. This is a creature of deep sin that you go to fight. Only through sin may it vanquish you. It will tempt you in many ways, but you must resist evil. The sign of the cross and the prayers of our people are most potent against magic. Keep your lips clean from its lips, and your heart clean from the evil it will try to teach you. Only in this way may you hope for victory."

Davil spoke to him: "Have no fear, Kolya. If your heart is pure, and you resist the blandishments of the Bagheeta—beautiful as she may become—then surely King God will send strength to your sword. I can see you now, riding back to us in the morning with the slain were-beast over your saddle bow——"

Rifkhas cut him short: "I can see you too, Kolya! But I can see what a fool you will look if you follow the advice of this impotent old rimester. There is but one way to hunt—whether you hunt leopards or were-leopards, it makes no difference—and that way is to go stealthily—and not on horseback with a clanking sword at your side. Do what I have told you to do and you will not fail to find the Bagheeta: go to the water hole and wait—else you will not see hair nor hide of the creature all the long night through."

The crescent moon edged down below the horizon.

"It is time, Kolya," said the *hetman*. "May King God bless you, pure of heart."

Kolya mounted, and wheeling his horse, rode toward the forest at a foot pace.

"Mind what I have told you," Rifkhas shouted after him.

As the first slender saplings of the wood brushed against him, Kolya could hear Davil singing:

"I ride beneath the silver stars,
All in my war array.
I ride beneath the silver stars
To break Bagheeta's sway."

His sword swung reassuringly at Kolya's side. From behind him the second verse of Davil's song came floating to his ears.

"The land about does gloomy lie,
And black Bagheeta's way."

The distance muffled the other words of Davil's ballad. But Kolya could remember them. They sang through his mind as the wood grew denser and denser about him. He had often heard them before. Some verses brought him courage. He recalled:

"I ride with flowers in my hair,
And grim sword at my side,
Among the youths I am most fair,
And in war foremost ride.

"To me unknown a maiden's wiles:
For see; my heart is pure.
God looks upon my head and smiles:
For see; my heart is pure."

Other verses brought him dread:

"King God, look on my woful plight:
Pity and give me aid.
Hang out the moon to give me light
And guide my palsied blade."

The trees rustled in the light night currents. Each falling leaf, each snapping twig, brought sharp ice to the skin of Kolya's back. Clumps of deeper darkness—some fallen tree or jagged stump—denser than the overflowing night, caused Kolya to tighten his reins and grip fast the hilt of his sword. Out of earshot of the *hetman* and the others, Kolya drew his sword slowly from its sheath. The weight of the weapon, its fine balance, brought no comfort to his disturbed mind. The empty sheath banged now and again against his leg, making him wince at each contact. It would be just so softly, and with just such lack of warning, that the Bagheeta would spring upon him from the dark thickets at either side of the path.

SLOWLY, drawing rein again and again so that he might strain his ears for some sound of his mystic foe, Kolya traversed the wood. Now so frightened was he by the menacing stillness of the forest that he would have preferred to return to the men; but fear of the taunts which he knew to be the lot of a coward forced him on.

Again he rode through the wood. Again he peered right and left for some sign of the beast, fearful always of seeing golden eyes glow at him from the pitch blackness of the night. Every rustle of the wind, every mouse

that scampered on its way, flooded his heart with fear, and filled his eyes with the lithe, black bulk of the Bagheeta, stalking toward him on noiseless paws. With all his heart he wished that the beast would materialize, stand before him, allow him opportunities to slash and thrust and ward. Anything, even deep wounds, would be better than this dreadful uncertainty, this darkness haunted by the dark form of the were-beast.

Near to the place where he had entered the forest, Kolya turned his horse about and rode through again. This time a greater fear had crept into his heart. What if the were-cat were to take advantage of its magical powers? It had done so with Davil. He remembered how he had gone, while still a student at the riding-school, to the village well to wash the blood from his face after a spill, and of how Mailka, the daughter of Davil, had placed her arm about his shoulder, so that with the corner of her apron she might wipe the blood from his forehead. He remembered now with a sense of horrible fear how he had longed to crush her to him, how some strange well-spring in his blood had forced him, against his own will, closer to her. It was only the passing of Brotam, the shepherd, which had prevented him from folding Mailka to his heart. And Mailka was not beautiful, nor willing for embraces. How then would he resist the Bagheeta, beautiful and inviting? He was sick with fear. His stomach was like a pit of empty blackness, as black as the night, as black as the Bagheeta.

It was with relief that he reached the opposite end of the woods and remembered that so far he had not come upon the Bagheeta. Somehow this thought gave food and drink to his fainting heart. If the Bagheeta were so strong, if these tales of supernatural power were true, why then did it not appear and make away with him? It must be, he thought to himself, an ordinary, spotted leopard which had frightened the shepherds in the morning. With this in mind, Kolya began to make plans to find and kill the beast.

"Thrice have I ridden through the wood on this side of the stream," he deliberated; "then it is reasonable that the Bagheeta, if it is such a creature, is on the other side of the stream. I will go there."

Where the stream narrowed a bit, Kolya jumped his horse across, landing with a thud on the firm bank of the opposite side.

Twice he rode through the woods on this side of the stream, making, at intervals, little sorties through the forest as far as the cliffs which bound the copse on either side. He could find no trace of the Bagheeta.

Intent upon the hunt now Kolya had lost all fear. "It must be," he reasoned, "just as Rifkhas told me, that I must hunt the beast on foot, waiting for him at the water hole."

With this plan in mind, Kolya rode directly along the bank of the creek. The high walls of the creek bed, Kolya clearly saw, would prevent even a creature as agile as a leopard from going to the water's edge for a drink. Then, of a sudden, his horse shied back. Before him, Kolya could see where a slide on each side of the creek had made a sloping pathway to the water. Dismounting, he inspected the place. Hoof marks and paw prints were indubitable proof that the place was in use by all the animals of the vicinity. Kolya led his horse a little way from the bank and tethered it stoutly to an oak sapling.

He divested himself of his *kaftan* and sword belt, pulled his dagger from its sheath and stuck it through the waistband of his breeches. Then, sword in hand, he returned quietly to the water hole. Carefully he stole down half-way to the water and then, flattening his back against the wall of the cut, prepared to wait.

Even as he settled himself in a

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The HAUNTED WOOD of ADOURE

BY ELLIOT O'DONNELL

"Then came silence, broken only by the sounds of dripping blood."

THERE were three of us, Alphonse Duroque, literary editor of the Lyons *Gazette*, Gus Lawrence, sub-editor of the Chicago *Saturn*, and myself, and we were seated in the parlor of the only inn in Gretagne, discussing ghosts.

Presently Lawrence exclaimed, "Did you ever hear of an executioner being haunted? I have met quite a number in my time—Pete Barrow of St. Louis, Ed Gover of Saratoga, and a host of others, but when I have asked them if they have ever seen a ghost—and who more likely than a man who has sent so many people into the next world?—they have only laughed."

"That's in America," Duroque remarked quietly. "There seems to be some antagonism in that country of yours, either in the soil, or the atmosphere, or the people, that keeps ghosts away. In France it is different. I know an executioner in Lyons who once had a very startling experience with a ghost."

"Tell us about it," I chimed in.

"*Eh bien,*" Duroque observed, "and remember it is true. I guarantee it. Vibert, who narrated it to me, never lies. He is—what do you call it?—the very incarnation, embodiment of veracity, and it happened to him, himself. At the time it occurred he had only recently been appointed to the post of assistant executioner in the

Province of Bayenne, which, you doubtless know, lies about fifty miles to the southwest of the Cevennes. Well, one afternoon—to be correct it was the last afternoon in 1900—he left Ravignon, the town where he resided, and set off on his bicycle, one of the old-fashioned sort—push-bikes I think you call them—for Delapour, to make arrangements for an execution which was to take place there in a week or so's time. His knowledge of Bayenne was, at that period, very limited, and as he had forgotten to bring his road map with him, he had to stop frequently to ask the way. This, added to the roughness of the roads, which, for a considerable distance were undergoing repair, delayed him very considerably, and it was almost dusk when he reached Blanchepard, a tiny town lying barely half-way on the road to Delapour. Feeling hot and tired and badly in need of refreshment, he stopped at an inn and ordered refreshments."

"Wise man!" Lawrence remarked. "For a Frenchman, extremely sensible."

"Bayenne red wine and chicken," Duroque observed, ignoring the interruption, "are excellent things when one is tired, and Vibert did justice to them both. Indeed, he dallied so long over his meal that the dusk had given place to darkness and the shadows of night were already conspicuous by the roadside when he finally got up from the table and asked mine host the nearest way to his destination.

"'The nearest way to Delapour,' mine host replied, his eyebrows contracting in a slight frown, 'is through the wood of Adoure, but I do not advise you to go that way tonight.'

"'And why not, pray?' Vibert asked. 'Is the track very bad?'

"Mine host shook his head.

"'No,' he said, 'the track is not bad. It isn't good—none of the roads in this part of Bayenne are good just at present, but it is passable. It is the wood itself, *monsieur;* it has not a good reputation.'

"'Not a good reputation!' Vibert ejaculated. 'Bears, or robbers? Which?'

"'No, *monsieur,* neither one nor the other. The wood is haunted; and tonight, remember, is New Year's Eve.'

"'Surely it is only on Midsummer's Eve and All Hallow's E'en that the spirits of the dead wander,' Vibert laughed.

"'That is so, *monsieur,*' mine host said gravely. 'It is the spirits of the living that are seen tonight and they sometimes rehearse deeds and scenes that are none too pleasant. If *monsieur* is wise he will shun the wood and get to Delapour by way of Baptiste and St. Gabrielle.'

"'Is that a much longer way?' Vibert asked.

"'It is longer by about five miles,' mine host replied.

"'That settles it, then,' Vibert answered lightly. 'Ghosts or no ghosts I go through the wood,' and after settling his account with mine host, he once again mounted his machine and set off in the direction of the Wood of Adoure. Pedalling quickly through the main street of the little town that looked bright and festive, as it should do on New Year's Eve, he soon gained the high road, stretching as far as he could see into the gloomy countryside ahead of him. A few farm teams returning from their labor in the fields passed him, and an Old World, slow-going wagon, with its tinkling bells, swinging lamp, and quaintly clad driver; and these were the only cheery sights and sounds he was destined to encounter for some time.

"For many a mile after this the road led up a gradual ascent and Vibert was exposed to the full fury of a sudden windstorm that howled and moaned piteously. Having at last gained the summit of the hill he found himself on a seemingly inter-

minable plateau. Overhead ragged clouds drifted over a wild, lowering sky, and all around him no living thing was visible, except a few rooks, whose croaking voices blended well with the soughing of the wind.

"Anxious to escape from this inhospitable spot, Vibert rode on as quickly as possible and eventually came to some crossroads, where a signpost pointed down a very steep descent to the Wood of Adoure. Some half-hour's careful riding, for the ground was very rocky and full of ruts, at length brought him to the confines of a forest of seemingly vast extent. He guessed at once it was the Wood of Adoure. He got off his bicycle to relight his lamp, which had suddenly gone out, and then, remounting his machine, pushed along a narrow track bordered on either side by tall trees, whose knotted and gnarled trunks gleamed a ghostly white wherever the moonbeams fell on them.

"The valley in which this wood was situated was far below the level of the road he had recently been traversing, and the wind, which had swept with great force across it, was here scarcely noticeable, and no sound save the faintest rustling of the trees tops far overhead and the occasional crackling of brushwood under the feet of some wild animal of the night was to be heard.

"Having arrived at a comparatively smooth piece of ground, albeit the descent was into a slight hollow, he was pedalling rather fast down it, when either a hare or a rabbit shot across his path, and in swerving to avoid it, he crashed into a boulder and was pitched over the handlebar of his machine. After a few seconds he got up, feeling rather dizzy and shaken, to find the front of his bicycle practically crumpled up. He was deploring the prospect of being obliged to perform the rest of his journey on foot, trundling the two wheels along with him as best he could, when through the naked branches of the trees, away in the distance, he espied a light.

"He at once made for it and found, to his joy, it proceeded from a small house on the banks of a swift-flowing and very swollen stream. In answer to his repeated raps, the weather-beaten door was at length very cautiously opened, and a girl appeared on the threshold, with a lamp. By its sickly light he saw she had black hair, very dark and rather obliquely set eyes, high cheek bones and perfectly even teeth that gleamed like pearls. She was good-looking, but it was in rather a strange way, and there was a curious glitter in her eyes as she stared at him that reminded him of the glitter he had seen in the eyes of leopards and other big animals of the cat tribe. Like so many French women, even of the poorer classes, she had very shapely hands, with long, tapering fingers and almond-shaped nails that shone like agates.

"In response to his request for a night's lodging she demurred, but, on his pleading inability to go any farther, owing to his complete state of exhaustion, she told him he could wait in the hall while she went to consult her husband.

"Apparently the house was very old. The hall was low-ceilinged, and stone-flagged, and on one side of it was an ingle, and on the other a broad oak staircase leading to a gallery. Several oil paintings in tarnished frames hung on the oak-paneled walls and in one corner stood a great grandfather clock, a fishing-rod and blunderbus.

"Vibert had no time to take in further details, for the girl now suddenly appeared in the gallery and telling him to come up stairs, bade him, before he did so, carefully to latch and lock the front door.

"On entering the room into which she ushered him, he received a surprize that almost amounted to a shock, for seated in an armchair by the fire

was a feeble old man, who rose to greet him with difficulty.

"'My husband,' the girl said shortly, avoiding Vibert's wondering gaze as she spoke. 'He is an invalid.' And she pointed to an array of medicine bottles on the mantelshelf. 'Henri!' and she raised her voice almost to a shout, 'this is the gentleman who wants a bed.'

"'He can have one,' the old man croaked. 'Six francs bed and breakfast, and you pay me, not her. Money is not safe with women, they are too addicted to spending it.' And he gave a feeble laugh which ended in a wheeze.

"'Asthma is one of his complaints,' the girl explained. 'He is seldom free from it. You would like some supper?'

"'If it is not giving you too much trouble,' Vibert said, gallantly. 'I am famished.'

"'Give him some ham and milk,' the old man chimed in. 'That is all we can do for you, *monsieur*, and it will be two francs extra. Food in these parts and at this time of the year is dear, very dear.' And leaning forward in his chair, he waved his skinny hands over the crackling pine logs—the only cheerful sound, Vibert thought, in the house.

"Supper over—he consumed it, conscious all the time that the dark, sloe-like eyes of the girl-wife were fixed on him with a strangely intent expression—he asked to be shown to his room. It was in a long corridor, lighted at the farthest end by an oriel window. The room, in keeping with the rest of the house, was low-ceilinged and oak-paneled and had many curious nooks and corners, besides several cupboards inset in the walls. In the center of the room stood a great, grim-looking four-poster bed, with the usual ponderous canopy, and over this and everything hung an atmosphere of gloom.

"DIRECTLY the girl was gone, Vibert scrambled into bed. He put his lighted candle on a little table close to the head of the bed, but well out of the way of the curtains, and for some minutes read an evening paper he had bought during his journey. Tired after his long ride, however, he gradually dozed off, leaving the candle still burning.

"He awoke suddenly and completely, with a vivid sense of being no longer alone. Opening his eyes he stared round, without lifting his head from his pillow, and reassured no one was in the room, he was about to close them again, when he suddenly heard the tap, tap of high-heeled shoes on the polished oak floor of the corridor, faint but distant, and growing nearer and nearer. All his faculties at once on the alert, he sat up in bed and listened. Saving for those sounds all was silent, with a death-like oppressive silence such as one never experiences save in lonely country places.

"There was not even a breath of wind stirring the leaves on the branches of the great elm trees outside, and inside not even the friendly scratching of a mouse to be heard behind the wainscotting. Nearer and nearer drew those footsteps, cautious, rather hesitating, but all the same persistent. They came right up to the door of Vibert's room and halted. Vibert could feel someone was there listening, intent on catching the sound of his breathing in order to tell if he were asleep or awake. Recollections of stories he had heard about murders in wayside inns came crowding into his mind and filled him with cold terror. It was so hopeless to be trapped here in this remote wood, miles away from any village or town and, in all probability, far away from any other dwelling, and he was unarmed, too. Like a fool he had forgotten to bring his revolver.

"He had a knife, a small pocket

dagger, it was true, but of what use would that be against bludgeons or firearms? Would it not be better, he thought, to take the plotters by surprize and either burst through or attack them, than to have them suddenly burst into the room and attack him? Besides, the suspense was intolerable. Naturally brave and impulsive, he decided to adopt the former course.

"Getting out of bed without making a sound, and tiptoeing noiselessly across the room, he turned the key quickly in the door and tore it open, expecting to see, if not several, at least one person; namely, the wearer of the high-heeled shoes. To his utter amazement, however, the corridor was absolutely empty. Nothing was to be seen there saving the moon, shining clear and bright through the oriel window, and on the walls, looking out from their gilt frames, the calm, immovable faces of men and women, ancestors, presumably, of the old man who occupied the house.

"Vibert stood for some time straining his ears, but he could catch no sound, not even the ticking of the clock in the hall beneath. Thinking it very odd, but persuading himself that he must have been mistaken and that the sounds he had heard were due to rats, he shut the door softly and locking it, got back into bed.

"Once more he fell asleep, but only to awake, as before, very abruptly, and with a sensation of intense horror. The moonbeams poured in through the window and illuminating the curtains on either side of it, made them appear like tall specters. They gleamed, too, with an unearthly whiteness across the bed, and Vibert, constrained somehow to follow their course, observed that they shone with a peculiar intensity upon the door, and he could not remove his eyes from it. The handle of the door, especially, had a horrible fascination for him, and he kept watching it. He strove with all his might to look elsewhere, but he could not. All his senses seemed to be forcibly centered on it. Then, suddenly, he gave a great start. God in heaven, was it fancy or reality? The door-handle was turning.

"Slowly, very slowly, it turned and the door began equally slowly to open. He tried to move, to do something, but he could not. His limbs refused to act, he was paralyzed, paralyzed and tongue-tied. Still the door kept on opening, while the moonbeams seemed to get whiter and colder and the room fuller and fuller of them. Then, round the door there suddenly appeared a head and face, a bullet-shaped, close-cropped head, with very projecting ears and dark, gleaming eyes that wandered round the room and at last settled on the bed with ferocious glee.

"Vibert now became conscious of someone lying on the bed by his side. He saw nothing, for he was unable to remove his gaze from the face in the doorway, but he could hear the person beside him breathing, the deep, heavy inhalations of a person wrapped in profound slumber. Meanwhile the door kept on opening, and at last, into the room with soft, cat-like motion stepped a broad-shouldered, muscular man, holding in one hand a large horn-handled knife, the sharp blade of which gleamed hideously in the moonlight. Behind him, holding a basin in her hands, was the girl-wife, a look of horrible cruelty in her sloe-like eyes. They approached the bed noiselessly, apparently too intent on the object by Vibert's side to notice Vibert himself. In a large mirror, i. e., a cheval glass that stood facing the foot of the bed, Vibert now saw, reflected with frightful clarity, everything that happened. He saw the man seize hold of the head of the recumbent person by his side, whom he now recognized with a thrill as the old husband of the girl. He saw the girl place her basin under her husband's neck and he watched her face light up with unholy glee as the cruel knife, flashing through the moonbeams, was drawn ruthlessly across the old man's throat. There was one

awful gurgling groan and then silence, broken only by the ghastly sounds of rushing, dripping blood. For some minutes neither of the murderers stirred, but stood by their victim, alternately gazing at him and at each other. Then suddenly Vibert caught them in the mirror looking at him. His candle had long since gone out, and the moon being at this moment suddenly obscured behind clouds, the room was now plunged in utter darkness.

"Vibert made a colossal effort to move and free himself from the fearful terror which rendered him powerless. It was in vain.

"After what seemed an eternity the bed creaked and a big, coarse hand gripped him by the throat. At this juncture human nature succumbed and he fainted.

"WHEN he recovered consciousness and opened his eyes, the early morning sun was pouring in through the window-panes and someone was rapping loudly at the door. It was the young wife with his breakfast of coffee and a roll and fresh country butter. He looked round, in fearful expectancy of seeing some signs of the terrible drama he had witnessed in the night. There were none, and when he tried the door it was still locked on the inside.

"Much puzzled, for his experience seemed far too real and vivid for a dream, he took in his breakfast, and after consuming it, dressed and went downstairs.

"To add to his bewilderment the old husband who had played such a ghastly rôle in the midnight tragedy was sitting in front of the log fire in the parlor smoking serenely and occasionally wheezing.

" 'I hope *monsieur* slept well,' the girl wife said, as Vibert, having settled his account, prepared to depart.

" 'I had some rather queer dreams,' Vibert replied, looking with no little admiration at her teeth, which, as I have already remarked, glistened like pearls.

" 'Ah, *monsieur*, it was New Year's Eve,' the girl laughed. 'If they were unpleasant, I hope they won't come true.'

" 'I hope not, too,' Vibert said dryly, and bidding her good-bye, he picked up his broken bicycle and resumed his journey.

"TEN months later he was at Baptiste, this time in the capacity of executioner. It was a sudden call. Émile Guilgant, his chief, had been taken ill and he was called upon to act in his stead. Hitherto he had merely been Guilgant's understudy. He knew little about the case, saving that a man named Bonivon was to be guillotined for the murder of Gaspard Latour, a well-to-do, retired wine merchant of Marseilles. The murder had been committed in the Cevennes district and Latour's wife had assisted in it. Although she was probably the instigator of the crime, the judge who tried her, having regard to the verdict of the jury (French juries are noted for their leniency where women are concerned), merely sentenced her to a term of imprisonment. That was all Vibert knew; he was ignorant of the exact spot where the crime had been committed and of the details of the case which had shocked all Bayenne.

"He did not see the condemned man till a few minutes before the execution, when, in company with two warders, he entered his cell to pinion him. He then received a shock. The man was the exact counterpart of the murderer in his dream or vision or whatever else it was that he had had on New Year's Eve in the Wood of Adoure. This man that he was about to execute had the same bullet-shaped head, the same projecting ears, the same dark eyes and the same short, broad figure. Also, he had the same huge, coarse hands. Vibert would have known them anywhere; he had felt their grip, and a shudder ran through him as he looked at them.

"As their eyes met, an expression of bewilderment came into those of the murderer, which expression suddenly gave way to a look of recognition, mingled with diabolical hatred. Vibert said nothing; he simply pinioned the man, and walked with him to the scaffold.

"When it was over and he was lunching with several of the officials of the prison, he asked them where the murder had taken place and how it was done.

" 'Why, don't you know?' one of them replied. 'What curious chaps you executioners are! In the Wood of Adoure, of course. Bonivon cut poor old Latour's throat, while Madame Latour held a basin to catch the blood.' "

A Bizarre Fantasy Is

THE GREEN FLAME

By DONALD WANDREI

MOULTON'S grandson watched with covetous eyes the strange actions of the old man. Behind locked doors, the old man thought himself safe, and performed the ritual that had become the soul of his existence. But his precautions were useless, as they had been for weeks, and his grandson looked on.

Within, for all his eagerness, the old man raised the lid of the box as if he thought it was empty. And even when he saw the heap within, he tilted the lid slowly until it hung back. Not till then did he raise the lamp. The emeralds that had lain dark within the chest began to glow softly as the first rays of light fell upon them, and when the lamp was directly over the heap, those on the surface shone with a wondrous green fire, a fire that mingled the dark tones of the sea with the sinister duskiness that moves within the depths of absinthe, a radiance as of stars and phosphorus and polished jade all wrought into one color, glowing with a mystic and ineffable glow. He lowered the lamp closer to the heap, and the slumbering fire burst into a blaze of dark glory that flashed from center to center, from stone to stone, from facet to facet, kindling every jewel, melting and blending the shades into living splendor. He swayed the lamp back and forth above the horde, and all the emeralds began an innumerable winking and twinkling in little green tongues of fire that played across the gems, that flickered from every jewel, that leaped and danced as they poured forth all together their deep beauty. And he set the lamp down at his side and plunged his hands into the pile, and drew forth great handfuls of emeralds. And he let them fall in a stream past the lamp so that every stone sparkled and scintillated mysteriously while it imprisoned within its depths that priceless, living glow. And the stream of stones flashed upon the walls dark shadows that shifted with the shifting of the lambent tints of the jewels. In an ecstasy, he threw a shower of emeralds into the air so that flaming jewels filled the room with a tinted darkness shot with sparkles of green.

Again he lifted the lamp above the chest, and the emeralds shone with a multitudinous fire that swayed, oddly rhythmical, as if the gems were chanting an unknown music, could he but translate the colors into sound, into a symphony in green.

His eyes were lighted and his face shone with rapture; as he turned away from the horde to leave the

chamber, green fires burned before his haunted eyes.

Moulton's grandson wanted those jewels. There was only one way to obtain them. Even the thought of murder did not appall him in their presence. His kinship had long passed from his mind. Since he could not open the safe himself, he would be forced to kill Moulton while the old man played with his sorcerous gems. One thing still delayed the grandson.

A week later, even that one thing no longer made him wait. He was watching Moulton the night his collection became complete, the night he unwrapped the hugest emerald in all the world, and the myriad other stones paled beside a blaze of fire that flared out from his last jewel. They called it "The Green Flame." It had come from the heart of India, and now, in this chamber, it seemed to foam and overflow and spill out a wicked torrent of light. But the fiery stream that enchanted the old man raised in the younger only greedy thoughts.

IT WAS after 1 o'clock when Moulton's grandson left his room a couple of nights later. He carefully turned his flashlight around him. The house was of great age, and strange. All the paneling, the decorations and tapestries dated back to older years. There were many rooms, and the passageway rambled in all directions. Some of the doors looked as if they had never been opened. It was a good thing he had lived in the house, else he could only have found his way with difficulty.

He followed his course and halted at length before the heavy door. Before entering, he stood in dusk for a minute. The silence was unbroken, as before. Somehow, he wished it weren't quite so silent, or the house so gloomy. Still, everything must be all right. Moulton had entered more than an hour before, and a light still burned inside.

He cautiously inserted his duplicate key and turned the door-knob, taking pains to make no sound. Then he slowly pushed the door open.

On the threshold he halted aghast. In the center of the room lay the body of the old man, curiously shriveled and shrunken. Beside it, on a table, lay an emerald, an emerald such as the eyes of man had never beheld, a great jewel of monstrous size. But he knew that no gem of such size existed in all the world, that "The Green Flame" was not one-third so large. The entire room shone with light and more than light, and in that fire, the bright ray of his flashlight glimmered pale and feeble. For out of the center of the emerald shone a flame, and that elfin flame rose and fell and rose, and with its rising and falling, an awful fire streamed out upon the table, across to the walls and along the walls to all the corners of the room and back; and with the ebb and flow of that terrible flame, the fire in the jewel blazed anew, while the air burned with a strange, unearthly radiance. For the emerald was aflame, and its heart was aflame, and its surface was aflame, and inside it was all fire, and from it poured that dreadful wave of glory. And in the core of the jewel, a great, burning stream arose, and with its rise and fall, the hellish fire shone forth and the sinister blaze burst out as if long pent up, to swell the ebb and flow of flame across the table. And the fire blazed from one emerald!

A shiver shook Moulton's grandson. Then a blind terror overwhelmed him, and, scarce knowing what he did, he swung up his revolver and fired. There came an angry *spat*, an answering *crack* as the gem shattered. He screamed; at the same time, the house rocked to its foundation—the air burst with thunder—a strange lightning flickered about—the entire heavens seemed to be falling—he groped vainly as a rushing wall of blackness swept upon him.

EARTHWORMS of KARMA

By Lon Dexter

"He turned fiercely, expecting to encounter the ferocious Crobe."

1. A Voyage to Mars

JOSEPH KISER stretched his stalwart form and inhaled deeply of the cool refreshing air. Every fiber of his six feet of brawn thrilling at the promise of relief from a long period of enforced inactivity, his clear blue eyes swept the vision of near-by trees, vines and wind-swept cloud isles with a renewed appreciation of their worth.

His voice, however, bore unmistakable evidence of disappointment as he turned, opened the heavy iron door beside which he had been standing, and called in a loud, clear, resonant voice: "Come, it is quite all right; the atmosphere is of air like our own, and it is most refreshing. But it seems that we can not see the city as we expected: we must have come too far."

At first glance the scene which Joseph Kiser stood contemplating would have seemed quite commonplace, but when one observed more carefully and noted that the sky overhead was of a dirty brownish tint,

and that many stars were plainly visible although it was midafternoon, one would have been moved to wonder.

"Gad! But it is good to be out in real, honest-to-Coolidge *air* again!" exclaimed Kiser as his two companions, a slim and very pretty girl, and a bearded middle-aged man, emerged through the door in his wake. "It was so stuffy and close inside the *Arrogant* that one can appreciate real air and sunshine after having been for forty days aboard it! Take some good deep breaths; there seems to be plenty of oxygen in this atmosphere, for all that our scientists claim it will not sustain the life of an Earth being."

"Yet, to an extent the scientists are probably correct. Since the beginning of our journey I have been preparing all of us for this landing; otherwise it isn't likely that we would be able to breathe here with so little discomfort. The barometric pressure here is very much less than it is upon the surface of the Earth." The speaker was Professor Archibald G. Hervy, who had been the last of the trio to emerge from the great iron trap, and he spoke with the calm assurance of one who has studied his subject.

"Why, everything appears so utterly commonplace that I half believe we have traveled in circles and landed upon Earth again!" The girl's voice, despite her protestations at the lack of the bizarre in the scene, trembled with excitement and suppressed enthusiasm. "Surely this can not really be Mars! Here are trees, flowers, weeds, grass, and everything! Ooh! I feel as though I were mountain-climbing!" She drew the heavy fur coat which she wore more closely about her shoulders, for her slender graceful body was all a-tremble with the unaccustomed chill of the Martian atmosphere.

"But," returned Kiser, "do you not recall the canals and those remarkable cities which we saw through the telescope? The huge canals which lead from the poles to all parts of the land and undoubtedly supply water from the polar thaws to the interior, and those huge cities which must far surpass any you have seen upon the Earth?"

The girl smiled up at Kiser, her great blue eyes all aglow with her excitement and enthusiasm. "Joe, dear, the telescopes were so badly befogged that I could not be sure of anything. Perhaps that was a sort of madness, and we imagined we saw through the lenses those things which we so hoped to see. I am not at all assured of the reality of this adventure from the beginning. Why, just to think that we have actually reached another planet is too much for a suppressed imagination like mine. It is too much for one to realize all in one brief moment. Do not talk to me; let me think. Let me think and look."

Several minutes passed in silence. At length the girl spoke again. "But where are the canals and the cities? I don't see them, now that we are here! And everything is so like an Earth scene that I can not believe—why, it is so ridiculously absurd to pretend that we are upon Mars!"

Professor Hervy smiled indulgently, for he knew that had another challenged the successful culmination of their adventure, his daughter would have been the first to defend. "It is but reasonable," he said, "that the Earth and Mars should have many features in common. Are they not sister planets in the same solar system? Yet, if you but observe attentively you will note many differences. The foliage upon the trees is purple instead of green. The leaves upon the trees are many times larger than you will ordinarily find upon the Earth, as are also the blades of grass, which you see is also more of a brownish purple than green.

"This is because of the rarity of the Martian atmosphere; the foliage being necessarily larger in order that

the plants may obtain the required amount of oxygen. The sky, too, is murky rather than blue as it would appear were there an abundance of air as upon the Earth; the stars are visible in broad daylight, and—look! There is Phobus!"

Following the direction of his gaze the two saw a large pale luminary in the sky. It appeared several times larger than our own moon, and was in the quarter; although the non-luminous portion was plainly visible.

Again Ruth Hervy snuggled into the confines of the great fur coat, for she was trembling—not alone from the cold, but at this new evidence of the magnitude of their momentous undertaking. "What is it? A—moo—moon! But—but is so much too large!"

"So it indeed appears," returned her father, "but as a matter of fact it is very much smaller than our own satellite. Mars has two satellites, both of which are very small and revolve upon a comparatively short radius. However, I dare say that this fellow, if it is Phobus, the larger of the two Martian satellites, is larger and farther from the planet than the astronomers of Earth have judged. Their smaller luminary, Deimos, is evidently not visible at this hour.

"The unique thing about Phobus is the fact that it revolves around the planet three full times in one day, while Mars rotates upon its axis in approximately the same time as does our Earth."

The three who stood thus gazing with awe at the fast-moving Martian satellite—this stalwart, handsome, altogether American youth clad in boots, knickers, and flannel shirt; the pretty, blue-eyed, golden-haired girl almost completely hidden in the huge fur coat; and the bewhiskered, middle-aged man, bald, inclined to stoutness, and heavily clad against the zero weather of the thin Martian atmosphere—had but a few weeks previously set out upon the most hazardous adventure ever undertaken: that of spanning the almost infinite etheric void separating the Earth from the planet Mars!

And that this stupendous and hitherto impossible feat had been accomplished their recent landing had barely sufficed to prove even to themselves; for each more than half expected to awake at any moment and find it all a grossly absurd dream.

2. The Columbus of Space

For the past ten years Professor Archibald G. Hervy had striven to perfect his dream of interstellar navigation. Quite by accident, he had discovered that an electric current passed through a vacuum tube into which has been placed a small quantity of helium gas would materially decrease the weight of any object within the radius of its activity, and he had worked diligently to perfect and control this discovery.

Despite his efforts, he was unable to neutralize completely the force of gravity for many years. It was not until late in 1929 that he solved the puzzle which had eluded him for so long, and perfected his "Neutrograv," by means of which he could control the gravitational attraction from the Earth, the sun, and any of the heavenly bodies at will. With the perfection of this device, he turned all his attention toward building a craft with which he could visit the other planets of our solar system.

The problem of space navigation involved, among other things, the storage of sufficient air, water, and food; provision for maintaining a reasonably constant temperature while out in the void; the removal and destruction of carbon dioxid and other waste matter; the devising of a craft sufficiently strong to withstand the unopposed inside pressure when it should have passed beyond the range of the Earth's atmosphere; and the provision of some means to see outside

without unnecessarily weakening the walls of this craft.

Then when all these known contingencies were met and overcome, there still remained much that was obscure and that only death-defying adventure and experiment could reveal—enough to make the boldest soul hesitate.

But at last the craft was completed, and Professor Hervy had made several trial flights; one of which the inventor estimated must have been protracted until he had traveled a distance of more than ten thousand miles beyond the surface of the Earth!

The *Arrogant,* as he named his craft, was a torpedo-shaped receptacle thirty feet long and constructed of steel throughout. Its nose was turned skyward in the derrick constructed for its ascension. It was some ten or twelve feet in diameter at its middle; its belly, slightly flattened, was equipped with eight small wheels for landing; and opposite these were four large steel-lined compartments — one opposite each pair of wheels—which housed four huge gyroscopes to assist in maintaining equilibrium if needed.

Between the two steel surfaces of the walls was ample storage room for gasoline for the petrol engines for use in recharging the storage batteries in case of necessity.

There was one huge door which could be sealed air-tight from the inside, but there was no propeller, no planes, no rudder; the only control apparatus being a large Neutrograv inside the craft, and the gyroscopes mentioned above.

Inside the *Arrogant* were to be found many boxes of provisions, the Neutrograv and its equipment, a large electric radiator, two large telescopes projecting through the iron walls, one at each end of the craft, and three tiny though snug sleeping-compartments. The nose of the craft was the heavier end, and it was here that the control mechanism of the Neutrograv was placed; with a small snug seat for the operator, so placed that he could sit upright when the directions became reversed and look ahead through the telescope.

From this point the operator could begin the flight by "cutting out" the attraction from the Earth and "cutting on" that from the planet Mars, once that planet was directly overhead. This done, the craft would arise with its nose pointed upward—which would immediately become downward —and *fall* toward Mars—slowly at first, but the rate of speed increasing with an acceleration corresponding with the law of falling bodies for that planet.

Although this rate of acceleration would of necessity be much less than that involved in the law of falling bodies for the Earth, yet such an object as the *Arrogant,* falling toward Mars with no opposing force to check it, would soon attain an enormous rate; and this, of course, must be controlled. This was done by cutting on a fractional part of the Earth's attraction again when necessary. Or, when the desired rate had been attained, one might simply cut out all the gravitational attraction affecting the *Arrogant* and thus become merely a neutral body moving in space in the same direction and at the same rate forever—or until again acted upon by some external force.

And these deductions proved to be correct, or nearly enough so. After a short time of flying through space, Professor Hervy threw the current into all the vacuo-helium tubes, thus cutting all attraction from the craft, and they continued to speed in the general direction of Mars at the enormous rate of one hundred and fifty thousand miles per hour!

Yet, despite this enormous rate, they appeared to be standing quite still.

Walking was impossible, and locomotion with any degree of certainty was very difficult. They found that they could float suspended in midair quite as easily as they could stand

upon the floor of the *Arrogant*. To move from place to place they soon learned to propel themselves about with the very slightest move of foot or hand. A push against the floor or walls would set them moving, not to stop until they came in contact with some solid part of the craft.

It was great sport at first, this flying about the confines of the *Arrogant* at will, but long before their voyage was finished it became exceedingly irksome, until they each began to fancy that nothing would be more acceptable than a good resounding step upon terra firma.

When they had come within a few thousand miles of Mars, Professor Hervy again switched on the attraction from that planet and then gradually applied a part of the Earth's gravitation to slacken their enormous speed and avoid destruction by the friction of the Martian atmosphere. Soon they had attained a very modest rate and were greeted by blurred views of canals, lakes, and cities; blurred because of the condensation of moisture upon the cold lenses of the telescopes.

This was one of the things which had not been reckoned and one which rendered their landing very difficult. Nevertheless the lenses cleared somewhat before they reached the surface, they passed some miles beyond a very large city, the landing gyroscopes were thrown into action and the landing made without serious mishap.

And here it was that Professor Hervy; his business associate, Joseph Kiser; and Ruth Hervy, daughter of the one and sweetheart of the other, alighted from the *Arrogant* with wonder and anticipation—the first Earth beings to set foot upon the planet Mars. Nowhere, however, within the range of their vision was there any sign of the habitation of man or other animal. They had landed in a small glade surrounded by a dense forest of scrub timber which obscured their view of the city near which they were sure they had chosen their landing-place.

THAT the habitation of man or some intelligent being was near at hand was certain but the manner of their reception at the hands of the inhabitants was not, and they fell to discussing some means of approach to the near-by city. If only they might approach the city unseen and learn something which might lead to some conclusion as to the kind of reception that might be expected at the hands of the inhabitants! At length they decided to attempt to do so.

So engrossed did they become in their observation and discussion that they failed to note the approach of a huge hairy creature which emerged from the forest and cautiously approached them as they talked.

Suddenly there was a coarse grunt —or was it a word? It was repeated and with more emphasis.

"Glick?"

The three were much startled by this unexpected sound; Kiser, who happened to be in a stooped position at the moment, assumed an upright position with such suddenness that his feet left the ground as though he had been hoisted into the air by some unseen force, so slight was the Martian gravitation compared with that which his muscles had been developed to resist. All three turned to gaze with horror upon the most hideous creature they had ever beheld.

Standing upright and some seven feet tall, his two thin legs seemingly disproportionately short, his small wasp-like abdomen tapering gradually into the massive chest and shoulders which were nearly thirty inches across and surmounted with a neck which was almost giraffe-like, being some ten inches long, and seeming to telescope backward and forward as he observed them, there stood a loathsome and hairy beast which grimaced ominously as if appraising them as a possible meal.

Could this be a Martian man, or was it some beast analogous to the apes of Earth? He most certainly did not appear human in any respect except that he seemed to be talking.

His arms were somewhat longer than those of the Earthlings and appeared to have an extra joint between wrist and elbow, though the hands were human in every detail. These hands were twitching nervously and the arms seemed almost to coil rather than flex, giving one the impression that there might be other extra joints between elbow and shoulder. The most horrible thing about this creature, however, was its face, which was of a death-like whiteness. The mouth was large and was equipped with two rows of huge yellow fangs which were undoubtedly used for rending flesh. The forehead was low and receding; the nostrils were much like those of a horse, being merely two large holes with no nasal prominence whatever; the eyes were mounted upon telescoping projectiles which seemed capable of unlimited protrusion and retraction as this creature would occasionally shift them in his interested scrutiny of the Earthlings. The creature's head was somewhat larger than that of a man and was covered with a thick mop of bristling red hair, whereas the remainder of his body was covered with long downy black hair, and about his middle he wore a rude sort of cloth which in itself suggested human intelligence; but the creature's expression was ferocious, even threatening.

"Glick!" repeated the strange apparition and the interrogation was unmistakable. He advanced a step toward them, his short pointed hair-covered ears extended forward in the manner of a scared jackass, while the remaining features suggested ferocity.

Ruth uttered a slight scream and clung to Kiser's arm. "Oh, such a terrible, terrible creature! What can it be?"

"My God!" gasped Kiser. "Can it be that Mars is peopled with such as he?"

"It may be so, but I doubt it," responded Professor Hervy. "Did you bring your gun?"

"Yes, I have it, but I dare not use it until I am sure that this is not a Martian man and that his intentions are not to be friendly! What do you think?"

"Cligue egglong glick! Cligue egglong ing thuger!" roared the creature, his eyes glowing ominously and yet with his ears extended forward as though he feared to approach nearer.

"This creature is a Martian man!" said Kiser in a hoarse whisper. "But I can not fathom him; I am half inclined to believe he is scared and half inclined to think him ferocious. One thing is certain: he is talking—but what does he say?"

"The way I interpret it," smiled Professor Hervy, is that he intends to kick you headlong into thunder, and he looks amply capable of doing it; you had better keep your gun in readiness while I try to communicate with him."

The scientist began making signs and pointed toward the Earth, which still was quite plainly visible in the dusky sky; then he indicated the *Arrogant* and made a motion as of flying through space in an effort to impart the information that they had but just arrived from that planet.

But the creature gave no hint that he understood and appeared to have given no serious thought regarding the possibility that the bright greenish star which he could see so much plainer than the others might be a world similar to the one upon which he lived. Instead he bared his huge teeth and grinned ominously.

"Glick! Glick! Egglong glick! Egglong glick!" he screeched, and there was the unmistakable quality of anger in his tone.

"I tell you this fellow is talking," said Kiser, "and he is becoming impatient at our stupidity. We don't

need weapons, we need an interpreter."

With this he sheathed his automatic, and advancing toward the strange creature he held out his hand in the universal token of friendship. "I don't just savvy your *'Egglong glick'*," he said, "but here goes: *'Egglong glick!'* "

Too late he perceived his mistake and attempted to snatch back the hand which he had extended in greeting, recoiling in horror as the huge creature uttered a coarse growl and, bending with surprizing agility, caught Kiser's right hand with his strong sharp teeth! Then before Kiser could recover from the shock of it the beast's long arm "uncoiled" and he grasped the surprized Earthman by the throat.

As the fingers of the ferocious creature closed about Kiser's windpipe his teeth released their hold, and the Earthman, struggling to free himself, grasped the seemingly sinewy arm with both his hands and tuggled with all his strength. To his amazement there came the sound of breaking bones, and the creature released its hold and sprang backward with a howl of pain.

Anticipating another attack, Kiser drew his automatic and was upon the point of discharging it into the huge bulk of his antagonist when he noted that the other appeared to be entirely subdued, for he was nursing his injured arm and whining piteously. He stood thus occupied for some moments while Kiser held his gun in readiness; then he turned on his heel and slunk moaning into the forest.

"WELL, I'll be hanged!" ejaculated Kiser.

"We should have guessed," responded Professor Hervy calmly, "that the creatures of this planet would be but poorly developed in strength and resistance because their bones and muscles are not required to oppose the natural resistance of a force of gravity such as ours."

Kiser frowned and then smiled in good-natured banter. "Yes, there you go, Prof, ever ready to throw cold water upon my least idea of self-glorification; I was flattering myself that I'm a much stronger man than I probably am, when you venture the suggestion that my seeming prowess is due to planetary differences!"

Professor Hervy regarded him with unsmiling earnestness. He replied: "Well, cheer up; you may pose as Samson among the Martians once we have worked ourselves into their good graces, if we ever do."

Ruth had returned to the *Arrogant* for gauze and bandages. She now rejoined them and began bandaging Kiser's injured hand. She seemed none the worse for the near tragedy which she had just witnessed, but was visibly perplexed. "Can it be possible that that creature is a Martian man? One of those super-intellectual beings you have talked so much about who constructed the great canals and erected the immense buildings you claimed to have seen? If so, then I am very much disappointed in the Martians and will soon be ready to return to Earth."

For the first time Professor Hervy displayed bewilderment. "It is a most grotesque thing to suppose, and yet this creature was undoubtedly talking. He certainly does not measure up to the standard I have visualized for the Martian; he is too stupid to be a human being and yet too intelligent for a beast. He talked, gestured, used emphasis, and evidently said 'cuss-words'; but in the matter of hospitality he has most assuredly been found wanting. I am at a loss to account for such a type of creature."

"Well, well," said Kiser, "this is Mars and we have no means of anticipating what we may find. We must observe and learn, and the ferocity of the creature we have just met has convinced me of one thing: we must not

venture to take Ruth into the near-by city. I shall go into the city alone while the two of you stay near the *Arrogant* where you will be safe until I return and report to you what I may learn."

After much discussion Kiser carried his point. It was elected that he was to advance with the utmost caution, making his way to a point quite near the city where he might be able to observe the actions of the inhabitants and attempt to determine what manner of beings they were and surmise what their attitude would be toward the Earthlings.

There was some argument as to the direction of the supposed city and at length Kiser climbed one of the tallest of the trees upon the border of the glade in which they had alighted, to learn that the city in question was in a different direction than any of the three had thought, it being apparently some three or four miles to the west of them—or toward the afternoon sun.

3. The Martians

Both Professor Hervy and Ruth were somewhat despondent and depressed after Kiser's departure. "I suppose I shouldn't have insisted upon coming," lamented Ruth. "But for me, you and Joe might have gone together as I so well know you should have liked to do. And yet, Dad, I would not have missed this experience for worlds. I hope you are not bored because I came along?"

"No, indeed! It has been a greater pleasure than you know to have had you along; although of course I did not wish to expose you to danger and for that reason I at first opposed your coming. But, as a man's life is divided into three stages: one in which he obeys his mother, one in which he obeys his wife, and one in which he obeys his daughter; and as I am now in the third stage of life, you came—after you proved to be so obdurate I was very glad indeed to have you with us. I am glad that you are with us now, although I will not deny that I disliked to send Joseph out alone."

"Oh, it is dreadful! To think that he is approaching a city which is probably peopled with creatures such as the one we just saw! And he is so hot-headed and rash—I fear that he may expose himself to detection and be killed by these rude people."

"And no doubt your fears are groundless. This planet is peopled with a far older race than we, undoubtedly; and it is only reasonable to believe that they surpass us in hospitality as well as the other elements of civilization." And yet, despite the reassurance he had given, Professor Hervy's mind dwelt with forebodings of evil upon the probable fate of his comrade in the near-by Martian city. He ventured no further conversation, until at length both looked up suddenly from their moody contemplations, for they had heard a distinct but elusive buzzing sound.

Glancing upward, Professor Hervy saw what appeared to be a brightly varnished piano approaching them from the air.

"Look!" he said. "An aircraft! Joseph has found a friend and is returning."

"And they must be friendly, too, for they are going to serenade. See, they are fetching a piano!"

"Ah, it is easy enough for you to joke now that your lover is returning. That is indeed a strange aircraft; I wonder what propels it? Take your stand near the door of the *Arrogant*, Ruth dear, so that we may retreat inside in case they prove hostile. We probably have nothing to fear from the Martians, but we must use caution until we are sure."

Alighting some twenty paces from the *Arrogant*, two creatures emerged from the unique craft and approached them, but Kiser was not one of them.

One glance and the Earthlings knew that they were standing face to face with a man of Mars, and that the

creature they had seen previously was some lower order of being.

These two—a man and a woman they judged, although they were dressed exactly alike—were similar in many respects to the other, but the hideous ferocity was lacking and the faces were more expressive and intellectual.

The larger of the two was nearly seven feet tall, with massive shoulders and broad chest which tapered acutely to a very small waist and narrow hips. His legs seemed very frail indeed, being some three or four inches in diameter at the thigh, with corresponding diminution in size toward the ankle. These legs were rather short compared to the body and the arms were long as well as having much better muscular development. As in the case of the first creature the arms had a double-hinge joint between elbow and shoulder and a like one between elbow and wrist, though the hands were exactly like those of the Earthlings. These creatures had rather large heads, apparently some ten inches in the antero-posterior diameter by probably eight inches between the temples. Both were quite bald. The mouth, nose, chin, and neck were not unlike those of the Earthlings save that the nostrils were much larger; but the eyes were those protruding, telescoping, hideous eyes which had been so terrifying in that first Martian creature but which were much less unbecoming in these.

Their dress was of the very simplest kind, consisting of neat, snug-fitting cover-alls, leggings, and sandals; neither wore a hat, and the only thing which characterized the one as a woman was her smaller size, more delicate features, and broader hips.

They approached the Earthlings with apparent friendliness.

"*Glick?*" asked the man. "*Egglong glick?*"

"Listen!" whispered Ruth. "The same words the beast used!"

There could be no doubt that this man was asking an explanation of their presence here and this Professor Hervy attempted to give him by means of signs. He pointed to the Earth, which glowed more brightly now in the approaching dusk, then at the *Arrogant*, and then at themselves.

The Martian seemed to understand and smilingly advanced with extended hand, and the Earthlings were very much startled to hear him address them in perfect English. "This is a very remarkable thing!" he said. "Earthman, I welcome you to Masovada."

So astonished was Professor Hervy at this unexpected greeting that for a moment he could think of no fitting reply. He was half inclined to doubt the authenticity of his ears; almost he doubted his own sanity. To hear this "bug-eyed" Martian converse thus fluently in his own tongue was uncanny—impossible! "Will you pardon me," he said at length, "if I ask my daughter if she has heard the same thing I did?"

"And had it not seemed impertinent I should have asked you that same question," said Ruth in a voice of awe and wonder.

Both Martians laughed. "It no doubt surprizes you greatly that we speak your language." The man shook the hands of the two Earthlings with undeniable geniality. "I can appreciate your astonishment in that matter, but before you ask for explanations please allow me to congratulate you upon your most magnificent accomplishment. This, I dare say, is the greatest scientific achievement of all time. I am honored to be the first to greet you and to be the first to extend to you the hospitality of Masovada."

Professor Hervy was still somewhat bewildered. He replied: "Although I am sure that I shall awake presently and be embarrassed at the absurdity of this dream, I shall attempt to enact my part of it while it lasts. I assure you that we are more than delighted to

make your acquaintance, for we have suffered some anxiety as to the manner of welcome we might receive here. My name is Hervy; as you appear to know, we are from Earth—are Americans, to be accurate. This is our craft, by means of which we have the honor to pay your planet this visit. This is Ruth Hervy, my daughter."

"We are Frambrozo Himnun and my sister, Merlene Himnun. We dwell in yon city of Keto. Pray permit us to act as hosts to yourself and party; there are others?"

In their astonishment at hearing the Martians speak an Earth language so fluently both Professor Hervy and Ruth had for the moment forgotten Kiser, although at any moment they had subconsciously expected to see him emerge from the strange craft in the wake of the two strangers, so certain had they been in the beginning that he had directed the Martians to them.

"There are but three of us. Did you not come upon my associate in your city and did he not direct you how to find us?"

"No indeed. We saw no Earthman in Keto; we espied your craft from the air quite by accident. He can not reach Keto on foot unless he swims across the canal, and if he had reached the city I should have known it. Unless he has lost his way in the forest he will probably soon return. But come; let us go to my apartment so that we may have a good view of the city before nightfall. I shall have a watcher sent at once to pick up your comrade as soon as he returns."

"But he might return before your watcher arrives, and he would be greatly alarmed to find us gone."

"That isn't likely. The watcher will be here in—in about ten minutes, as you would reckon time. I have already asked that one be sent and have been informed that my wishes are being complied with."

"But how could you have done that unless you knew that you would find us here before you started?"

"By means of what you Earthlings would call 'telepathy'; only that word, as you understand it, does not properly describe the science as we have developed it. Even as I made the suggestion I communicated with a member of Keto's governing council, who assured me that a watcher would be sent immediately to direct your comrade to my apartment as soon as he should arrive here. Even now the city of Keto, and all of Masovada as to that, is wild with excitement at the news that three Earth beings have arrived upon the planet in the flesh."

"Do you mean to say that everyone upon this planet already knows of our coming?" asked Ruth in astonishment.

"Oh no! By no means. I have given the news to the council-governor of Keto and he has advised all other members of the governing council throughout the planet, and each of these has advised his local news bureau, which corresponds to your newspapers. Many Martians will not learn of your coming until they consult their news records. There will be many thousands of the inhabitants of Keto who will not learn of your arrival until tomorrow, as the most of them peruse their news records while awaiting their *racknee*—pardon me, breakfast."

"That is very interesting and very wonderful," said Professor Hervy. "I am impatient indeed to inspect your city and to learn the wonders of your magnificent civilization."

"Come," said Merlene Himnun, speaking for the first time since she had demurely acknowledged her introduction to the Earthlings; "if we are to view the city from the air we must start at once, for darkness is thickening and we will not have Trandos for quite some time yet. Let us be upon our way."

When all were comfortably seated in the piano-like contraption Professor Hervy asked: "What, may I ask, is Trandos?"

"Trandos," explained the Martian girl, "is our largest satellite, only about twenty thousand *perts* distant, and it rises and sets three times in course of the twenty-four hours."

"Ah yes. We of Earth call it Phobus."

"I was not aware," said Frambrozo Himnun with surprize, "that the astronomers of Earth had discovered Trandos."

Professor Hervy wondered vaguely just how much of Earth's history the Martians might or might not know, but just now there came a buzzing sound and the Martian craft was in motion; and he marveled that, although they had seen only highly polished metal as they approached, yet he could see through these walls without difficulty now that they were inside. He wanted to ask about this phenomenon, but there were so many things which he desired to know!

"How can you operate aircraft here where the atmosphere is so rare?" he asked.

"Only by utilizing the gravitation and magnetic force from Trandos. We have stored this energy in a huge blandol cell—and blandol, by the way, is an element which you do not possess upon the Earth—which has a strong attractive force for certain metals and a strong repulsive force for certain others; by controlling this magnetic force we can guide our kandikes wheresoever we choose. You were quite right in your conjecture that the buoyancy of our atmosphere is not sufficient to permit aerial navigation such as you probably have by this time upon Earth, although our gravitation is much less than yours, as you must have noticed."

Ruth had waited impatiently for the opportunity to ask the question which was uppermost in her mind. "Will you please explain how it is possible for you to have learned to speak the languages of Earth?"

Frambrozo Himnun's reply was but another surprize to the two Earthlings. "'In the Father's house,'" he quoted, "'there are many mansions.' And before I may tell you more I must await advice from the council of governors. After you have dwelt upon Masovada for a time you will have seen how interplanetary intercourse might be impractical at this time; I shall not attempt to explain more now because I may not, and because as yet you would not understand. Pray wait a while with patience until the council shall have conferred upon the significance of your visit to us; and their decision reached, you will understand our position better then than now."

By this time they had reached the border of a huge stream of water somewhat more than a mile in width and so direct in its course that the Earthlings knew without being told that it was a canal.

"That is the Vilwain Canal," said the Martian. "It is one of the smallest upon the planet; for when it was constructed, many thousands of years ago, it was not suspected that Keto would develop into the second largest city of all Masovada, and we are hard put to make the canal suffice for our needs."

"The canals were built for commercial purposes, then?"

"Yes, and for irrigation. We have no rainfall. Through millions of years of wear our planet became a more and more nearly perfect sphere, our mountain ranges were flattened as those of Earth eventually will be, and, with the rarity of our atmosphere, our rainfall became less and less dependable until the construction of lakes and canals became a necessity. Now we use them to move our heavier traffic and to water our agricultural lands."

Some thirty feet above the surface of the water the craft spun along, nearing the outskirts of the city of Keto and above very narrow streets

which, themselves little more than a dozen feet in width, intersected at intervals of about sixty feet. In the gathering dusk the surface appeared like streaks of silver, for each of the narrow thoroughfares was a small artificial waterway or branch from the Vilwain Canal.

They advanced through the streets of the city slowly and at any desired height, their speed, direction, and altitude being determined and controlled by the position of a small dial not unlike that to be found upon any radio receiving-set. Himnun had also started the strange craft with it.

The buildings were extremely high, some having as much as forty stories and each story was an added array of shops, laboratories, or living-quarters. At the level of each was a landing-terrace some six feet in width, upon which were parked many vehicles like the one in which they rode. Thus it was that the Martian city consisted of a series of streets, one above the other, constructed only for aircraft, save the lowest, or basement thoroughfare, a waterway where boats were going to and from the large vessels upon the canal and were loaded and unloaded to meet the city's need.

"You see our cities are quite unlike your own," remarked the Martian. "We Masovadans are not fond of walking and rarely indulge in it to any extent. Neither do we find it necessary to provide for overland traffic. Each person is provided with a kandike as soon as he or she is old enough to use it, and we find it adequate for all demands of locomotion and light traffic. Our ships upon the canals are radio-steered and the smaller ones are not even accompanied by a pilot. Our canal boats, our ships and our kandikes are equipped with a small repellent magnet which makes collision impossible."

"Why do we not see the occupants of the other kandikes?" asked Ruth.

"That is due to the type of glass used in construction of the windows of the kandike; it will transmit light rays in one direction only, hence we can see perfectly what occurs about us but can not be seen from the outside."

It was soon evident that there was not the expected division of the city into business and residential districts, although there was a certain regularity in the occurrence of the shops and the flats or apartments, and as there was mile after mile of these enormous buildings it was to be reckoned that Keto was a city of more than a million inhabitants.

The arrangement of the shops appeared to have been planned with a view to convenience rather than competitive display, and Himnun explained that upon Mars there was no competition; all merchandise was distributed without profit to the vendors; there was no such thing as wealth, no currency or any form of legal tender.

"If you will pardon me for so speaking," said Himnun, "we have learned many things which your Earth is yet much too young to have worked out. Where you have strife, competition and greed, here we have co-operation and good will; we realize that there is an abundance for all and our legislative council provides means for each individual to receive and do his share; we have no rich, no poverty, for we have allowed no man to hoard."

"But how can a government which must thus have its hands full as a distributing agency find time to enforce law and order?"

"By removing the attractiveness of the fruits of crime and the difficulties that might stand in the way of virtue we have eradicated the criminal. Why should a Masovadan commit crime when there is nothing he might gain thereby and when he may obtain all that his heart desires in an honest manner?"

"I can not comprehend such a system!" said Professor Hervy. "I certainly would never have thought it

practical—is it not an incentive to laziness?"

"There is no occasion for any Masovadan to be lazy, since all have quite enough leisure and since every individual is subjected to a scientific test to determine the kind of labor he is best adapted to, then is given work to do that is not irksome. And as to the practicability of our system, let me remind you that there is no poverty upon this planet; every Masovadan is wealthy, and there are very few shirkers; the only crimes we ever have are brewed over personal jealousies and prejudices, and these are far less frequent than you would suppose."

Further conversation was interrupted just here by the arrival of the party at the apartment of the Himnuns, which was an exquisite suite upon the seventh terrace of one of Keto's great buildings.

It transpired that Himnun was president of Keto's University of Science, and that his sister also held a chair in the university.

When he had made his guests comfortable Himnun excused himself for the expressed purpose of seeking Kiser's whereabouts and having him brought to join his friends; but after an absence of some thirty minutes he returned to say that he had broadcast the news of the arrival of an Earthman within the city together with an inquiry as to his whereabouts but that his statements had met with a deal of skepticism and he had been able to learn absolutely nothing regarding the missing Kiser. Was it possible that their friend might have lost his way in the forest and failed to find his way into the city? Surely a man of Earth could not have made his appearance in the city of Keto without being at once recognized as such and his presence reported!

Upon being assured that Kiser had not lost his way to the canal, Himnun asked if the Earthman could swim. There was no way for him to cross the canal, he said, except to have swum it, unless some Martian had taken him across. Neither Ruth nor Dr. Hervy knew whether or not Kiser could swim, and Himnun, much perplexed, left them to try again. Perhaps Kiser was being entertained by someone who had not reported his presence to the local representative of the legislative council; but this was unlikely, for such failure upon the part of any Martian to report promptly such an immensely important event would be looked upon with grave disfavor by the authorities, and here upon Mars they had no lawbreakers.

No word of Kiser was Himnun able to get; neither that night, the next day, nor for many days to come. The whole planet was aroused over his mysterious disappearance; search was instituted for him in every section; the council exhausted every effort to find him; the bottom of the canal was searched minutely with the Rall Ray, an illuminating machine which shed such a brilliant light as to illuminate vividly every object upon the canal bottom; but no trace of him was found; not even the minutest clue as to his probable fate could be unearthed. It seemed that the Earthling had been swallowed up by this strange world, leaving not the slightest hint as to his fate.

4. Revelations and a Mystery

On the morning following the arrival of the Earthlings upon Mars Ruth and Professor Hervy arose quite early, both a bit doubtful regarding the reality of their recent experience. Casual observation of their surroundings, however, served to dispel their doubts, for they were surrounded by fixtures and furnishings quite unlike any to be seen elsewhere than in a world apart from their Earthly abode.

Upon all sides of the bedrooms were several highly polished wall shelves which served as table, writing-desk or what you will; almost all of one wall was composed of a huge mirror; there

were spacious, plush-upholstered chairs equipped with large rollers in lieu of rockers; the Martian beds were suspended from above by means of a strong metal rod at each end and could be raised toward the ceiling or lowered to the floor with but little effort. Nowhere, however, could be seen any sign of artificial heating-devices or light fixtures, although the rooms were quite cozy and a brilliant and beautiful illumination appeared the moment one arose from bed.

After they had breakfasted, Himnun escorted them to his library, where he put on and "played" the news records announcing the arrival of the visitors; many of these were spoken in English for the benefit of the guests themselves. None of them, however, threw any light upon the whereabouts of Joseph Kiser.

Although Himnun had displayed an uncanny knowledge of Earth affairs, he expressed some surprize that the people of Earth had discovered radio. It had been used for many years upon Mars, he explained; but, due to the Martians' ability to broadcast their thoughts by a process resembling telepathy, they had found little need of it and now it was used almost exclusively in production of the news records, which were nothing more nor less than phonograph records which, when run, announced the news of the day.

When Professor Hervy inquired regarding the source of artificial heat, Himnun explained that all Martian buildings were equipped with pipes leading from chemical reservoirs wherein chemical reaction occurred, liberating heat; the process being automatically reversed in case the temperature reached a certain point, releasing vapor which absorbed heat until the mean temperature was reached again, thus insuring a constant degree of heat for both winter and summer.

"If you are at liberty to tell us now," said Professor Hervy, "we should like an explanation of how it happens that you speak our language."

"There is a diplomatic issue involved," returned Himnun, "and as yet I am not at liberty to answer that question. May I ask, however, if there might be any person upon the Earth who knows the secret of your craft?"

"There is none. There is probably today somewhere in the Arizona village from which we embarked a deputy sheriff who has a court injunction forbidding me to embark. When I learned of that injunction I sent word to the officer that he might serve it upon Mars, but as yet he has not come and I think I am safe for a number of years, to say the least."

"If it were known upon the Earth that you had made a successful voyage to Masovada, what would be the result?"

"Other craft similar to my own and far superior would be built and other Earthlings would visit Mars."

"Your Earth is still a war-like world. You have but recently had a most terrible war, if I mistake not."

"Yes, the worst in all history."

"Do you not see what that might mean to Masovada? Here we have evolved beyond the necessity of war or strife of any kind and are unprepared to protect ourselves against invasion. We have no munitions or implements of offense or defense and have not had any for thousands of years. Our system of government, we think, very nearly approaches perfection; but we evolved to it, and had it been suddenly thrust upon us thousands of years ago we would not have accepted it, just as the Earthmen would not accept it today."

"I can certainly see your viewpoint. It would indeed be hard for me to return to the Earth and refrain from announcing the successful culmination of our venture, if that is what you mean."

Himnun's reply caused both Earthlings to gasp in astonishment. "I do

not believe," he said, "that you will ever return to Earth! In the first place you probably can not do so if you wish; and in the second place you will not desire to return to Earth after having lived for a short while upon Masovada."

"I was not surprized that the people of Earth doubted my ability to fly to Mars but I confess that I do not understand why you imagine that I can not return in the same way."

"Unless you have a very adequate supply of compressed air stored in your craft you will never be able to make the return voyage, because upon Masovada your reservoirs can not be replenished. That is the reason we have never visited Trandos. Our kandike is propelled upon much the same order as is your craft, yet we can not store air enough to make even that short voyage, and oxygen, as you well know, will not suffice. You will not be able to fill your reservoirs here because of the low atmospheric pressure."

This was indeed a thing which had not been foreseen, for Professor Hervy doubted seriously that they had sufficient air stored in the *Arrogant* to enable them to return.

For some days their attention was occupied with the search for Kiser, but after every clue had been exhausted he was given up for lost. Mars seemed to have swallowed him up completely, leaving no trace to indicate what fate might have befallen him.

Although Ruth was heartsick and despondent for many days over the loss of her lover, Professor Hervy continued to learn many interesting things regarding Martian civilization. He was somewhat chagrined over their apparent inability to return to Earth and sorely vexed at the loss of his associate and comrade; yet he found many things to interest him and was interviewed by Martians of prominence from all over the planet.

He visited the electrical foundry of Keto and was many times the guest of honor at the University of Science, where he learned much which he felt would be of untold value to the people of Earth if only he might devise some means of returning to teach them the wonders of this Martian culture. But most instructive of all were his talks with the Himnuns; and Merlene Himnun never seemed to tire of his company nor of answering his many questions regarding the things of Mars.

ON THE morning of their tenth day as guests of the Martian, both Ruth and Professor Hervy were summoned to the presence of Frambrozo Himnun.

"The council has at length given me permission," he said, "to impart to you the information you seek. I am going to explain to you the source of our knowledge of your language, but before doing so I shall ask you to guess—perhaps you have already divined the answer."

"Some time ago you made a remark regarding the world war upon Earth which led me to believe that you may have perfected some instrument with which to observe the doings of us Earth beings so minutely as to have become familiar with our language," responded Professor Hervy, "but since that time your conversation has proved that you know but little of the recent events on Earth: and too, had you had such an instrument it is not reasonable to believe that you would have made such a minute study of the language as to have enabled you to learn to speak it so fluently; and again, I have found several Martians who do not speak English but who speak some other Earth language in addition to their own Martian tongue. I have racked my brain and exhausted every imaginable theory but must confess that I am stumped."

"My guess," said Ruth, "is that all Martians have lived upon the Earth."

Himnun smiled. "Ah! Another instance wherein a woman's intuition has outstripped scientific reasoning!

That is exactly what we have done. Before being born into Masovada we all lived one or more lives upon the Earth, and you, when you come to depart your Earth life, will be born upon this planet as a Masovadan. Masovada is the planet of remembrance because this incarnation is the first which carries with it the memory of our previous lives.

"When you were born with an Earthly physique your ego could not function to its fullest extent through that comparatively crude vehicle—your Earthly brain had no center with which your ego could impress upon your consciousness the memory of your previous lives upon the Earth, or of your life upon Venus. The brain of the Masovadan has such a center and we can remember our Earth experiences vividly."

Professor Hervy was astonished at this revelation and his expression showed it. "Why, you mean to say that—that—that you have lived—have lived and died upon Earth? Why, such a thing is uncanny!"

"I lived upon the Earth, and I died upon the Earth. I lived there and I died there three distinct times! My father, in his Earth life, was none other than your own Benjamin Franklin!"

"Remarkable! Then Mars is—what might be called Paradise! Perhaps, after all, we did not succeed in our attempt to reach the planet as we planned but were killed en route and are here—in Paradise?"

Himnun smiled in genuine amusement. "No, you are wrong again. You came to Masovada in the physical—a feat, I confess, which we never dreamed would ever be accomplished. And too, this is not what you call Paradise. The Paradise which you refer to is as much a mystery to us as to you, for even the Martian brain has no center which will enable it to recall what takes place between the death upon Earth and the birth upon Masovada. That interval is what you speak of as Paradise, and until your arrival we had no means of reckoning its extent; but now, since you tell us that it is A. D. 1930 upon Earth, or was so when you departed, we reckon that approximately seventy years elapsed between our Earthly demise and our Masovada rebirth. That time, of course, varies with the individual and is reckoned upon the basis of the Masovadan year, which is, as you well know, much longer than the Earthly year."

"Why, that is the most extraordinary revelation of all! I have never given much thought to such matters, but this is indeed interesting; pray tell us more."

"You have but to study your own religious psychology and apply the knowledge which I have just imparted to understand many things which may have heretofore seemed mysterious, but do not think for a moment that the whole plan of the universe has been revealed to you because we Masovadans are still low in the scale of evolution. We have advanced but one step from the Earth levels of knowledge and toward the infinite goal of perfection.

"One thing you should remember, however: no act of yours can escape your ego. Your every act, your every thought makes its impression and has its bearing upon your evolutionary progress, which may be retarded or hastened but may not be reverted."

"I presume then that there is no danger now of my being reincarnated as a cow or a horse in Mars?" smiled Professor Hervy.

"None whatever. The trend of evolutionary progress is ever upward. Man may bring great misfortune upon himself in his subsequent lives; yet he can not have lived in vain, and each life must add something to the development of his ego."

"Do you mean to say that one may be punished for something he did in some previous life and which he

doesn't even remember? How do you harmonize such a thing with justice?"

"It is not so much a matter of justice as of cause and effect. It is not that one is 'punished' for one's misdeeds, but one must suffer the consequences of them. But after all is said and done, it is the one and only means of attaining ultimate and unfailing justice, and if you will reason it out carefully you will see that this is the only way to harmonize known facts with your cherished ideals of a just God."

"But after Mars, what next?" asked Ruth.

"The ego passes from Masovada to occupy a physical body upon Jupiter; one life is lived upon each of the rings of Saturn, and then upon celestial Saturn. Further than that we do not know; further than that is infinite."

"Does your philosophy teach that all life originally began upon Mercury?"

"No, indeed. The beginning of the experiences of any ego may have been upon Mercury, Venus, or Earth. Here we have few insects, no birds, but we do have a few wild and domestic animals which must return to Earth and live before being given the body of a Masovadan. Do any of our scenes appear vaguely familiar to you? If so, perhaps you have lived here before as a marb, which is a highly intelligent animal. All marbs, even the wild ones of the forests, can converse quite fluently in the Masovadan language. All Masovadan marbs return to Earth and live several lives there before returning here as a Masovadan man.

"But I must be about my duties. My sister will probably be here presently and she will be glad to answer any further questions you may wish to ask regarding our philosophy, as you have called it; but please bear in mind that here in Masovada we do not merely believe—we know, because we are so constructed mentally that we can actually recall our experiences upon Earth, Venus and, vaguely, some of our experiences upon Mercury."

5. In the City of Norb

For a whole Martian month of fifty-six days Himnun, Professor Hervy, and a delegation appointed by the Legislative Council devoted a great deal of time to the search for Joseph Kiser. Every inch of the forest wherein the Earthlings had landed was searched; the marbs—huge talking animals like the one they had encountered upon their arrival—were questioned; publicity was broadcast over the planet both by means of telepathic communication and by the news records, and yet no trace—no minutest clue—as to his fate was found.

In the face of this state of affairs, interest in the search began to relax and bade fair to soon be forgotten—by all save Ruth Hervy. Her constant insistence upon more and more effort in the attempt to locate Kiser had caused the search to be prolonged beyond what it would otherwise have been, and now that there seemed no hope of his ever being found the nervous strain began to tell upon her and she grew more and more restless, did not sleep well, and would often start violently when spoken to. She seemed inclined to court solitude and was rapidly approaching a state of nervous exhaustion.

Upon Mars, where physical ailment has been almost abolished, there are no physicians, but the "Council Scientist" of Keto is the accepted health officer. So it was that Unel Kabo, Chief Council Scientist of Keto, was summoned to attend Ruth.

Unel Kabo was a Martian of somewhat smaller stature than Himnun, with an oddly shaped head in that it seemed disproportionately long in the occipito-frontal diameter and rather narrow between the temples; and his protruding eyes—which now that they had become accustomed to them the Earthlings found much less grotesque

than at first—seemed to glow with uncompromising harshness; his speech was direct almost to the point of gruffness.

"This young lady must have a complete change of scenery and a complete change of environment," said Kabo. "I should advise that she and her father go at once to Norb; there you will find new scenes, new facts of scientific interest to both, and new friends. It is absolutely essential that she have a change. Himnun, I leave it to you to make the necessary arrangements, and please see that no one accompanies her save her father."

"That I will do at once," responded Himnun. "Nasbin Filobe, president of the University of Norb, has sent repeated and urgent requests that the Earthlings come to Norb as his guests; I shall communicate with him at once and I am sure he will come for them tomorrow."

"That is well," said Kabo. "My niece, Delam Oblene, is sojourning in Norb at present and I shall have her meet and help to entertain you."

"Delam Oblene," said Himnun, "is one of Keto's most beautiful women. You will enjoy her very much I am sure, for, aside from being beautiful, she is very intellectual; she is quite popular in Keto."

By now the Earthlings had become somewhat familiar with the meanings of the various grimaces and facial expressions of the Martians, and Ruth was quite certain that she detected a brief look of extreme displeasure cross Kabo's face as Himnun made this remark.

"Nonsense!" said Kabo. "I do not consider her at all beautiful; that is only a matter of viewpoint."

When Kabo had gone and Ruth was alone with her father and Himnun she said: "I shall be very pleased to visit Norb, and I shall consent to go in case you promise that you will not call your physician again; I can't explain why, but I dislike him very much."

"My dear," reproved Professor Hervy, "you should not speak so candidly of your ungrounded prejudices. I, too, am eager to visit Norb and shall be ready upon the morrow."

NASBIN FILOBE proved himself to be quite as charming a host as Himnun had been. No pains were spared to make the visit of the Earthlings a pleasant and profitable one; there were other and even more wonderful things to be seen here, as Norb was the Martian metropolis with a population of more than five million souls.

Norb is upon the Zumite Canal, the oldest and largest upon the planet. The canal is more than five miles wide at Norb, and the city is a seaport as well. The archives of the city council contain a more or less complete history of the settlement for fourteen thousand Martian years, and a Martian year consists of six hundred and eighty-seven terrestrial days!

True to Kabo's prognosis Ruth began to recover her nervous balance at once with this change of scenery. Her cheeks soon regained their natural bloom and ere long her smile became quite natural again.

Both Ruth and her father, however, were greatly disappointed in Delam Oblene. True to Kabo's promise she came to call soon after their arrival in Norb, and they were surprized to note that, even judging by the Martian standard of beauty, she could not possibly be considered pretty; her language showed a decided lack of culture, and to both she seemed quite listless and unattractive. Why Himnun had spoken of her as beautiful they could not imagine, for it was quite unlike him to have made such a groundless statement.

Delam Oblene called upon the Earthlings many times during the first few weeks of their stay in Norb, but so distasteful did she become that her company was not cultivated, and after a time they saw her no more.

Both Earthlings regretted this distaste for Delam Oblene, however,

when shortly before they returned to Keto they heard that she had died and that even then her ashes were being returned to her uncle.

During his stay in Norb Professor Hervy made the acquaintance of one Thuba Rodeza, who proved to have been in his Earth life one of the scientist's most intimate friends of childhood. Upon Earth his name had been George Talley, and he had died of lockjaw at the age of twelve. This had been but thirty terrestrial years ago and the lad was now nine Martian years of age. (The Martian is full-grown at the age of twelve.)

Because of having died quite young this youth had spent but a comparatively short time in the astral, although he had not known that fact until Professor Hervy enlightened him. Many pleasant hours these two spent together reminiscing.

Despite the many wonderful scenes, the interesting people, and the companionship of Thuba Rodeza, however, Professor Hervy grew lonely for the companionship of Merlene Himnun. He missed the soothing presence of this intellectual Martian woman, whom he had first thought grotesque but who had grown to be beautiful in his sight, more than he had missed anyone for many, many years. He longed to return to Keto, and yet there were still many wonderful things in Norb to be learned. For instance, there was the huge micro-telescope, the like of which no Earthly mind has conceived. It was a very large refracting telescope, the image upon its mirrors being radio-transferred to a microscopic slide in such manner that very remote planets could be studied with considerable detail. Through this instrument Professor Hervy could discern with ease the rivers, lakes, and cities of Earth, some of which he could very readily identify. Venus and Jupiter, too, showed unmistakable signs of being inhabited, though with what manner of people he could not determine.

This and many other scientific features to be found only at Norb made the stay of the Earthlings very pleasant and profitable; yet Professor Hervy was somewhat gratified when Filobe advised him that Himnun desired his presence in Keto at once.

6. The Mad Earthman

PROFESSOR HERVY had long since learned to operate a kandike; so he and Ruth made the return trip to Keto unaccompanied by any Martian escort. And though the two cities are separated by some two thousand miles, as we of Earth would reckon distance, yet so speedily may the kandike be made to operate that they made the journey in a few hours, and arrived in Keto before noon.

Both Frambrozo and Merlene Himnun greeted the Earthlings heartily. A contingency had arisen, explained Himnun, which demanded Professor Hervy's immediate presence in Keto; upon visiting the spot where the *Arrogant* had been left since its landing Himnun had found that it stood in a different position from that in which it had been left! He was at a loss to account for this fact, for the craft had been left securely locked and was still locked. Who could have desired to move it, and what means had such an one employed to do so? The council was notified, and now a guard was stationed in the glade to watch, but as yet nothing further had happened.

Sure enough, the *Arrogant* was found to be lying in a position several feet apart from its original landing-place, as evidenced by the area of faded vegetation near by, and the still green grass underneath its present bulk showed that it had been moved but recently.

Professor Hervy hastily procured his key and unlocked the door of the craft. Both men went inside, where they found everything just as it had been upon the day of landing save that

several of the articles of equipment had been rearranged and one of the light bulbs was smashed.

"Undoubtedly the craft has been entered; but how? No one except Kiser and myself has a key."

"And who upon Masovada would presume to come here and tamper with your craft without permission from you and from the council?"

"I can imagine but two possibilities: either Kiser has returned and entered the craft or else someone who has found Kiser's key has been prowling here. If it is Kiser, however, where has he hidden himself all these months so securely as to defy all our efforts to find him?"

Himnun was silent for some moments. "I am yet inclined to the belief—as I have thought from the first—that the marbs made away with your companion and that some one of them has returned with his key and has entered your craft. It is unusual, however, for them to conceal anything which they have done from the authorities, as they are very superstitious and believe that a dire fate will befall any one of them who withholds anything from the authorities. They have frightful tempers and often commit grave atrocities when they run amuck, but heretofore they have always readily confessed these deeds when questioned.

"Of course it may be that Kiser has gone mad and is yet prowling about in the forest, but that is unlikely. There are still remaining in the forest, no doubt, a few specimens of the 'Borgus Plant' which will cause a man to lose his reason when he eats it: but it is unlikely that Joseph Kiser would have stopped to eat the unsavory leaves of a strange plant as he passed through the forest upon the day of your landing."

More mystified than ever, they emerged from the *Arrogant* and locked the door. As he examined the ground near by Professor Hervy exclaimed: "Look! Whoever it was who entered the *Arrogant* was intelligent enough to operate the mechanism! Here are the imprints of the wheels made in landing—and quite a nifty landing he made, too! I at first supposed that the creature, whoever it was, might have turned the switch and then, seeing that the craft was moving, quickly switched off the Neutrograv and allowed it to fall back in this shifted position; do you think that one of your marbs might have intelligence enough to fly the craft and alight without mishap?"

"That is indeed doubtful. I have never known a marb who could be depended upon to operate a kandike. Many men have tried to teach them, but usually without any great degree of success. Yet it is not impossible; a marb who is intelligent enough to keep his crime of murder a secret might be expected to be able to learn to operate your craft. At any rate we shall keep a guard posted at this spot and perhaps he will venture to make the attempt again; once we can catch him then the secret will be out."

Upon their return to the city they found Ruth greatly excited by a report that a strange Earthman had been seen in Sendos Addition, one of the very few bungalow suburbs of Keto, and, embarking in one large kandike, Ruth, Himnun, and Professor Hervy hurried at once to the street whence the report had come.

Here they beheld a most appalling scene of devastation. Fences and outhouses were laid low, shrubbery and small trees were pulled up by the roots, several of the small canal boats near by had been destroyed and their cargoes demolished. The Earthman, the inhabitants told them, was quite mad and had destroyed everything he could get his hands upon besides severely mauling several husky Martians who tried to intercept him.

Following this path of destruction which led them toward the main channel of the canal, they soon beheld the

Earthling standing upon the water's edge. He seemed to have recovered from his violent fit of temper and stood quite still as their kandike approached him.

"It is he! It is he!" cried Ruth excitedly. "Let us alight so that I may go to him."

"This is indeed strange!" said Professor Hervy. "He has most surely lost his reason. He must certainly have eaten the—what did you call it? Loco?"

They parked their kandike upon the terrace of a near-by residence and approached the Earthman upon foot, the natives watching them excitedly from the comparative safety of their dwellings.

"Do not be too hasty to approach him," Professor Hervy advised Ruth, "until we have ascertained whether he might attempt to harm you."

Kiser seemed uninterested in their approach. He stood gazing out over the water of the canal, massaging an apparent sore spot upon his head, and he seemed oblivious to the apprehension and destruction in his wake.

"Joseph!" called Ruth, "Joseph, whatever has kept you away from us?" She stopped short in surprize and consternation as the creature turned sullenly and without interest, eyeing them with no sign of recognition.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried, "what has happened to you? Don't you know me, Joseph!"

She took a few anxious steps forward and then stopped at a warning from her father, who in turn addressed the supposed Earthman but getting no response nor even a glint of recognition suggested that Ruth be not too ready to approach him until he might be brought to his proper senses.

This creature—for all the world like Joseph Kiser, but dirty, his hair dishevelled and mud-smeared — merely stood and gazed at the trio, his eyes expressionless, one bare foot twisting itself into the mire of the canal shore, whence he would occasionally raise a portion of the soft black mud with his toes and fling it far out into the water or upon his own back and head as chance might direct, with never a word or a smile, his mouth gaping open, his eyes bloodshot—a madman indeed he seemed to be!

As she viewed him thus, Ruth shuddered. Indeed something had destroyed his reason! A great sob escaped her as she stood watching him; he was sick, he needed her, perhaps if she should go to him and talk with him for a moment he might be made to remember. Before either of her companions could stop her she ran forward, caught the short sleeve of his garment and, while her voice shook with emotion, said, "Speak to me, Joe! Please say that you know me! Joe, what is the matter?"

And then, before the horrified gaze of Himnun and Professor Hervy—and so quickly that neither of them could make a move to prevent—this mad creature snatched Ruth Hervy up in his arms and sped boldly past them, retracing his steps over the area he had but recently devastated.

As the two men tried to intercept him he struck Himnun upon the shoulder with his open palm and sent him sprawling almost into the water of the canal and, evading the other, he ran at top speed, leaping over walls and outhouses—such of these as he had not previously destroyed—and made his way rapidly through the suburb, following indirectly the course of his original path of devastation.

Both Himnun and Professor Hervy gave chase on foot. The Earthling soon outdistanced Himnun, but the madman with youth and his more athletic physique gained upon him steadily, even with his added burden, and very soon he turned a corner and was lost from view.

Himnun, unaccustomed to walking or running, returned to the kandike while Professor Hervy continued to

follow on foot. Nor was it very difficult to follow the path of destruction he had wrought, but Professor Hervy was by no means sure that he would continue to retrace his steps. He could only follow as rapidly as he might and hope that Himnun would overtake the madman with his kandike.

7. Kabo

WHEN Kiser left his companions upon that memorable day of the arrival of the Earthlings upon Mars he soon became obsessed with the uncanny feeling that he had traversed this wood before. Every landmark about him seemed vaguely familiar and he seemed to sense the appearance of the landscape just ahead before he actually saw it. To the right and left were trees which he seemed to remember having played in when he was very young. "Why, how absurd such a fancy is!" he said aloud. "Can it be that this rare atmosphere is responsible for such aberrations? And yet I seem to recall that just over here there stands an old crumpled tree which has grown upward for some feet and then bends downward almost to the ground."

Sure enough, when he swerved his course somewhat to the right he came upon just such a tree as he had described. "Ah!" he whispered; "there it is, but it is larger than I fancied."

He continued upon his way, and without knowing how he knew it he was well aware of the fact when at length he approached the canal, although he could not see it until he came very close.

When he had reached the canal the uncanny feeling of familiarity with his surroundings seemed to leave him and he walked for some distance in each direction along the bank of the canal in search of a bridge or for some form of boat with which to cross and enter the city. There was no sign of a bridge, however, and he found no boat along the shore.

Several large boats were out upon the canal and these were moving along in both directions with incredible speed. Sometimes they would seem to be about to collide, but just as they came within a few feet of each other both would swerve aside and they would pass without mishap.

Kiser was at a loss to account for the uncanny speed of these canal boats, and, too, they had no smokestacks; apparently they were not propelled by steam power, and he could see no signs of life aboard them.

At length one of these boats approached much nearer than the others. He shouted and waved his arms, making all the noise that he could in an effort to attract the attention of those on board, but the boat sailed serenely by, paying not the slightest attention to his frantic waving or to his "Boat ahoy."

Soon this boat had passed beyond the range of his vision upon the smooth waters of the canal, and none of the others was near enough to hear his voice, he felt sure. He continued his apparently useless search for a boat and at length came to the edge of the forest. Here he was confronted by a branch or irrigation ditch from the canal which led to a near-by farm. A farm! Ah! Where there was a farm there ought surely to be a farmhouse; soon he would find someone who might lend an idea as to what manner of people the Martians were.

But to his surprize there was no farmhouse. He crossed the irrigation ditch and proceeded for about a mile along the shore of the canal and yet saw no sign of a house of any description upon this side of the canal.

Becoming fatigued, at length he stopped and seated himself upon the brink of an irrigation ditch to rest, and soon became lost in contemplation of the problem of crossing the canal. It seemed to be a season in which the farmers were not busy in their fields, and none of the boats upon the canal

seemed inclined to heed his signals. He felt that if it became necessary he could swim the canal, but he very much preferred to cross in some other manner.

Just as the sun was about to pass behind the western horizon he heard an exclamation behind him and someone spoke in plain English: "An Earthman, by Jove, and in the flesh!"

Springing quickly to his feet he turned to behold a man of about his own height, with massive shoulders and thin wasp-like waist, his tiny legs seemingly quite out of proportion to the bulk of his frame; his bald head reminded Kiser of a certain disease called hydrocephalus — for it had somewhat the appearance of an overdistended toy balloon, and his eyes protruded upon telescoping projectiles like those of the beast he had first seen.

Aside from those protruding eyes the creature's features were not so objectionable as his physique, and for a long moment Kiser stood staring at him in awed silence. Surely he must have been mistaken in thinking that he had heard the Martian address him in his own language; why was his mind so full of those strange fancies upon this day?

He was much reassured when the Martian advanced and extended his hand in a smiling token of goodfellowship. "I am very glad to welcome you," he said, "but how under heaven did you get here?"

Kiser found his voice at length. "Pardon my seeming stupidity," he said, "but have I heard aright?"

The Martian smiled. "Granted. You see I recognized you as an Earth being by your physical characteristics."

Too bewildered to take exception at this very evident sarcasm, the Earthman asked: "But how do you happen to know about the physical characteristics and the language of Earth beings?"

"Ah, that serves to remind me that introductions are in order. I am Unel Kabo, Council Scientist for the City of Keto which lies just across the canal. I have the honor to welcome you to Masovada."

"My name is Joseph Kiser. I arrived upon your planet today from Earth, as you have rightly surmised. I came in a craft specially constructed for interstellar travel. My craft lies some distance back in the forest, and I seek to gain entrance into your city."

"I shall be pleased to convey you into the city and to have you as my guest for the night. I need not ask how your craft is propelled—you have learned to control the planetary magnetic forces; but may I ask whether there are others upon Earth who understand this secret?"

Kiser elected to say nothing of his friends to this Martian until he should have learned definitely what his attitude was going to be.

"There is no one upon the Earth who can duplicate the craft in which I reached this planet, and the people of Earth will be greatly surprized when they learn that I have succeeded in reaching Mars."

"No doubt they will be. But come, let us go at once to my estate and show you some of the things which I am sure you will be glad to see."

Some twenty paces back from the canal shore stood the vehicle, like, and yet quite unlike, a piano. It had no wheels but sat flat upon the ground; its upright and highly polished walls were perhaps six feet high by four feet wide and about three feet from front to back. Its door opened from the rear, and once inside and seated, Kiser noted that the upper portion of the walls on all sides was quite transparent.

"This vehicle," explained Kabo, "is a kandike, and is operated very much as your own craft must be, excepting that it is probably far superior to yours. We can not undertake interstellar navigation in it because our atmosphere is too rare to enable

us to store a sufficient quantity of air."

THE Martian touched the steering-dial of his kandike and they were away, soon across the canal and into the city.

"How does it happen that you wandered so far away from your craft? And why did you not enter the city with it, may I ask?"

"Being constructed for interstellar navigation, it is unfitted for local transportation and to have attempted to enter your city in it would not have been safe."

"As I might have reasoned. Being an Earth-constructed craft, of course it is impractical for more than one purpose."

The biting sarcasm of this remark caused Kiser to flush in resentment.

"And yet," he rejoined, "it was an Earth-constructed craft which was first to make an interplanetary journey."

"Quite right, and for obvious reasons. What strikes you as the most remarkable thing you have thus far noticed about our planet?"

"Well, I have seen but little of it as yet. For one thing the method of construction of your city—and the fact that you have farms without any farmhouses."

"No indeed! All our farmers live in the cities. They can reach their farms by kandike without difficulty and they live where they may have the scientific advantages of the city."

"Then your farmers are probably very prosperous, I presume?"

"My dear sir, every one on Masovada is prosperous. There is no such thing on this planet as poverty. Poverty means ignorance—ignorance upon the part of the rich as well as the poor, and here we do not tolerate ignorance. Upon your Earth you have plenty of rainfall, and even an excess were it conserved, to supply all your needs, but you foolishly allow by far the greater part of it to waste. Perhaps many thousands of years from now you will have awakened to the necessity of lake and canal construction for prevention of drought and famine. You talk of self-government, and yet the people of Earth are not intelligent enough to assert themselves and demand their right to prosperity of the few who control the arteries of commerce. Your competitive system encourages greed and where greed is countenanced crime will thrive. Upon Masovada there is no legal tender and the needs of every individual are provided for and no one is permitted to hoard; so, you see, there is no incentive to greed, no incentive to crime, no incentive to deceit."

"And, likewise, no incentive to thrift! I should think that life under such conditions would become extremely dull and monotonous."

Although the Martian was rather caustic in his remarks regarding Earth conditions, yet he appeared to take no exception to Kiser's emphatic rejoinders.

"It is quite natural that you should think thus, but such is not the case; there is much less unhappiness here than upon Earth where your poor are unhappy because of the fear of ultimate failure and your rich are miserable because of fear of loss, fear of death, and disappointed hopes. Here we have our recreations and our professional duties which are assigned upon a scientific basis which makes every man's job a profession rather than an occupation; we know with certainty that none is going to starve; and none of us hopes to attain riches—therefore we are happy."

"But you have not yet explained how it happens that you know so much about Earthly things and that you speak the language."

"I see no reason why I should not tell you that I spent two very miserable lives upon Earth; that is reason enough for my knowledge of the lan-

guage and for my appreciation of Masovada."

"You have lived two lives upon Earth! Then perhaps all Earth beings are reincarnated upon Mars following their death?"

"All Masovadans have lived one or more lives upon Earth and all Earthlings will eventually be Masovadans, although some of them will have to remain on Earth for a thousand years or more and live and die there many times before they make sufficient advancement to equip them for a life on Masovada. But now we approach my estate; there is an eating-house just across the way and when we have dined I shall be delighted to show you about my laboratory."

When they had eaten, Kabo showed the Earthling many interesting things connected with his work. The grounds of his estate covered several acres and housed dozens of animals of various sizes, which Kabo used for experimental purposes. None of them, however, as Kabo explained, was sacrificed unnecessarily; for all would be human beings some day, or at least their souls would one day occupy the body of a human being and their progress must not be unnecessarily retarded. None of them was used for food, as the Martians are strict vegetarians.

There are but few species of Martian animals, the smallest being the vory, which somewhat resembles a rat, and the largest the marb, one of which Kiser had met soon after landing. A unique thing about the animal life of Mars is that all, with the single exception of man, are hatched from an egg!

The most interesting spectacle of all was a series of experiments which Kabo had performed upon two species of animals by means of which he had transferred the intelligence of a carnivorous animal to the body of an herbivorous one by an operation upon the brain of each.

The result of this interchange was quite remarkable. The habits of the two animals were reversed; the carnivore, which was a "kagle" and had been a vicious, cat-like creature, became very tame and cowardly and now ate only herbs and grasses—while the herbivorous "gunwee," which resembled a domesticated sheep in that they were by nature very gentle, took on the characteristics of the kagle and would viciously attack its supposed prey, spitting and growling in manner quite foreign to the gunwee and ofttimes with dire results to itself because of its frailty of body.

"This is quite remarkable!" remarked Kiser. "Do you transfer the animals' brains *in toto*?"

"Indeed no! Only the pineal body and a portion of the solar plexus. Thus I transfer the seat of memory. In other words, I transfer that part of the nervous mechanism through which the ego functions upon the physical brain. The ego is either bound to those certain cells in such manner that only death can separate them or else it has functioned through those particular cells for so long that it continues to follow the path of least resistance after the interchange, because the ego of such an animal is not well enough developed to do otherwise.

"It would be interesting to know whether the same thing would happen in the case of human subjects or whether the more developed ego would adhere to its original physical body. I tried the experiment upon a couple of marbs, but the characteristics of all marbs are so similar that I was never quite sure whether my operation succeeded or failed; for in reaching the pineal bodies I destroyed the speech centers and the animals could not talk after the operation."

"But can you not approach the pineal body without destroying the speech center?"

"Yes. I have since carefully studied the brain of a marb and I find that it can be done, and sometime I shall try

it again when I can persuade the Council to provide me with two marbs which I can spare from my service. The authorities object to my using marbs for this purpose, because they claim that the technique when perfected would be valueless."

"What, may I ask, is a marb?"

"Ah, pardon me! I forget that you are an Earthman. Come with me and I will show you a marb. They are our most intelligent animal and make very faithful servants; they talk fluently and can do what they are told, but they have violent fits of rage when angered and sometimes become unmanageable."

Kabo conducted Kiser to the door of a large stone building, procured a key and entered a well-lighted room, bare of furnishings and with a dirt floor. Inside this room were two huge, fierce-looking creatures exactly like the one Kiser had vanquished earlier in the day.

"These are my marbs. They are but one step below Earthmen in the scale of evolution and will soon be incarnated upon Earth. They are Crobe and his mate, Juak."

It was beginning to grow late, and the two left Kabo's garden and entered the long vine-covered passageway which led to the rear entrance of the house.

Kiser was thrilled with the awe of the situation and as yet he could scarce affirm the reality of his recent experience. He had withheld any information regarding the presence of Ruth and Professor Hervy because he was not yet quite certain that he wanted to trust Kabo. Had he but known the dire consequences of this silence he would have hastened to speak more frankly.

Just as they emerged from the vine-covered passageway they were greeted by a soft musical voice speaking in the Martian tongue, and, glancing up, Kiser saw the figure of a Martian somewhat slighter of build than Kabo, and although clad exactly like him, he knew instinctively that this creature was a girl.

Her skin was clear and suffused with the flush of health; her eyes, though characteristically Martian, were large and blue with a depth of expression and understanding; her mouth was well-proportioned and smiling. Kiser's first thought as he saw her thus for the first time was: "Gad! Given a wig and decent eyelids she'd be pretty!"

Although unfamiliar with the Martians' expressions of pleasure or displeasure, Kiser sensed that Kabo was displeased at the appearance of this seemingly pleasing girl. His annoyance showed only too plainly in his tone as he said: "Sir, this young lady is my niece, Delam Oblene. My dear, I have the honor to present Joseph Kiser, the first Earthman to set foot upon Masovada in the physical body."

The girl's face reflected her astonishment. "Marvelous!" she said. "I am honored. But how *could* you have accomplished such a feat! Why, sir, you have wrought an accomplishment that even the Gods never dreamed!"

"No! no!" laughed Kiser; "you underestimate the wisdom of the Gods. Surely they mean to promote interstellar intercourse, for have not they permitted my craft to open the way for just that? I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Delam Oblene, and please allow me to say that I am charmed with your wonderful planet and its more wonderful people."

"I hope you may continue to find us pleasing, but upon Masovada we do not say Miss or Mister; so do not be surprized if I call you Joseph Kiser—or just Kiser; that is our way."

Kiser had a feeling that he should like to talk with this Martian girl at greater length, and he felt that he could with safety confide in her regarding the presence of his com-

panions and seek her advice, but he was given no opportunity to do so, for she soon excused herself and left the room, whereupon Kabo conducted the Earthman to his bedroom.

"You need not bother about turning out the light," Kabo said. "It will be switched out automatically the moment you retire. I can not offer you books to read, because I have none written in your language. The speaking records similar to your phonograph instruments have almost entirely superseded the publication of books upon Masovada, but these also are spoken in the Martian language. In yonder desk, however, you will find several of the latest picture shows. One has only to start the machine and apply one's eyes to the lens, and the play goes on just as though one sat in a large and magnificent theater."

"Did they have picture shows upon Earth during your life there?"

"Indeed no! But now and then a soul comes over who has spent but a short period in the astral, and these persons tell us of the more recent so-called accomplishments of the Earthlings. To be candid, however, we do not know whether we spend a dozen years or a hundred in the astral. And, by the way, would you mind telling me what year it is upon Earth?"

"By now it must be 1929 or near it. We left Earth November 28, 1928."

"Ah! Then it has not been so long since my Earth experiences as I fancied. Would that it were longer! I shall now bid you good-night. Tomorrow I shall have much more to tell you, but I think you have learned quite enough for one evening. May you have pleasant dreams."

As KISER sat in contemplation of the strange experiences of the day and of the strange furnishings which surrounded him he had the uncomfortable sensation that he was being watched. For a time he tried to throw off this feeling in a minute examination of the wheeled chairs, the suspended desk and bed and the miniature picture shows, but as these were run in connection with spoken records in the Martian language he soon tired of them; yet the feeling that he was being watched persisted.

At length he arose and stepped softly to the door, opened it cautiously, and peeped out.

What he saw made him start with surprize, for even with the door closed he was able to see clearly through the glass of the door from without although it had seemed quite opaque while he was inside! And glancing up and down the hallway outside his door he caught sight of the huge marb, the larger of the two he had been shown, just as he emerged from the shadows of the vine-covered passage leading to the garden. The brute was approaching his door, although he had not looked up, and his gait suggested that of a sentinel!

Why had Kabo placed him in a room where he might be spied upon and set this beast to watch him?

Stepping quickly back into his room he closed the door, then he took the motion-picture machine from the desk and placed it upon the bed. Instantly the light went out and the room was in total darkness. He then returned to the door, opened it just a wee bit, and stood waiting.

When the shuffling footsteps of the marb had passed his door and up the narrow hallway to a point near the kandike landing-terrace where it ended, Kiser strode noiselessly out and down this hallway which separated the living-quarters from the laboratory and was soon in the comparative safety of the vines which overhung the entrance to the garden. Here he paused and glanced back. Evidently the marb had not spied him, for he still was walking with measured stride toward the kandike landing-terrace.

Although the temperature must have been below zero, Kiser was warmly clad and inside the garden he was confronted by a flood of the most glorious and beautiful moonlight he had ever beheld. From a cloudless sky the two Martian moons shed a blue-tinged halo all about the enclosure until it shone with a dusky brilliance which filled him with a strange and impelling feeling of awe. Phobus, or Trandos, from the east was boldly projecting his long shadows well into the western extremity of the garden in distinct contrast to the shorter, more delicate lines cast by Deimos, the smaller satellite, which hung more nearly overhead. He could see quite plainly, for the reflected light illuminated the scene with remarkable clearness; yet there was a degree of haziness which characterized the landscape as a moonlight scene—even as Kiser had known moonlight—albeit this was quite different from an Earthly moonlight scene, and more beautiful.

Crobe, the huge marb, approached upon his sentinal tramp, but he turned back at the vine-covered entrance to the garden, not suspecting that the guest—or prisoner—whom he guarded had left his quarters. Kiser watched him from the shadows until he was well upon his way back toward the front of the estate and then returned to the contemplation of his surroundings.

Many bright stars were visible in the heavens; which of them was Earth? Since that planet had been directly overhead at the time of their landing Kiser reasoned that it probably was not visible at this hour. And it was just as well so, for had he known for certain that he was gazing upon the Earth it would only have served to increase his bewilderment at being thus almost alone upon a foreign planet more than forty million miles from home and friends!

As such thoughts as these were coursing through his mind Kiser thought of Ruth. The moonlight had a romantic tinge and he wished for her and for a park and a bench.

At a slight rustle behind him he turned fiercely, expecting to encounter the ferocious Crobe and beheld standing before him a picture of indescribable loveliness. Boyish yet feminine, clothed in a jaunty blouse with furs about the neck, and neat gray knickers—or garments of that kind—there smiled up at him a beautiful Martian girl.

The moonlight shone full upon her face, and there were the eyes—those protruding Martian eyes which he had at first thought grotesque—and now in the betwitching haze of the Martian moonlight they were beautiful! Too beautiful to be real, Kiser feared, and they shone with a frank smiling sweetness far surpassing anything he had ever seen before.

She smiled the more as he stood gazing at her, spellbound. She shrugged ever so slightly and spoke his name.

"Joseph Kiser."

It was Delam Oblene. But why did her eyes which had but a bare hour ago seemed to detract from her appearance now appear so lovely as if none other would quite harmonize with her other features? And why did her baldness now add to her beauty whereas he had first thought it a disqualifying defect? Perhaps his few moments in the moonlit garden had served to impart to Kiser the Martian viewpoint, but upon these questions he did not have long to ponder; for now Delam Oblene was speaking again and her words brought him out of his stupefaction with a start.

"You are in great danger here, Joseph Kiser. You must go at once."

The astounding catastrophe which befell Kiser and his friends will be told in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES

The BLACK DRUID

BY Frank BELKNAP·LONG·Jr.

"God's Death! Does a Knight of Malta fear such as you?"

MR. STEPHEN BENEFIELD entered the library and hung his black Chesterfield overcoat on the rack which the trustees had grudgingly provided for the accommodation of inclement and cold weather accessories. There were seven other overcoats on the rack. Mr. Benefield paused to count them—he was a methodical and observing man—and passed to the reference desk. When the librarian approached him he nodded amiably.

"I wish to peruse, please, Lucian Brown's *The Cromlech Jeelos.* It is No. 3268 A. I looked it up yesterday in the catalogue."

The librarian scowled and went in search of the book. When she returned with it Mr. Benefield took it firmly between his lean, gloved hands and turned the pages until he found the passage he was seeking. "Rutilius Namatianus affirmed that the Druids invested all contiguous objects with their peculiar evil, so that anyone who touched so much as the hem of their robes was in deadly danger of becoming a partaker of their fallen divinity."

Closing the book Mr. Benefield smiled and passed it back over the desk. "That is the passage I was looking for," he explained. "I do not believe I shall need a copy of it. I thought it might be a very long passage, but it is so brief that I can remember enough of it to paraphrase it without the aid of a written copy. Thank you very much. I am Stephen Benefield, an archeologist. I use such passages in my books."

"They say his books are becoming frightfully obscure," cogitated the librarian as she returned *The Cromlech Jeelos* to its prescribed niche. "I don't wonder! How can a man who takes Lucian Brown seriously write comprehensively?"

Mr. Benefield made his way solemnly back to the coat-rack and stared for a moment in chagrin at the empty hook whereon he had hung his Chesterfield. "I am sure that I hung my coat on that rack," he ruminated. "And where it is now?"

Feeling decidedly anxious, he began hastily to recount the coats on the rack. There were still five garments remaining, and his anxiety did not diminish until he had completed his enumeration. Someone had deliberately—and illegitimately—lifted Mr. Benefield's Chesterfield from its original hook and hung it on the opposite side of the rack! He recognized it immediately by its gray silk lining and velvet collar. Taking it indignantly down he put it on and left the building.

All the way to the I. R. T., which was to convey Mr. Benefield to his home in the Bronx, he kept muttering to himself. "What right had anyone to tinker with my overcoat?"

Descending the subway stairs he deposited a worn nickel in the inevitable turnstile and boarded a train labeled 180th Street, Bronx Park.

The car was disagreeably crowded, but Mr. Benefield darted toward and successfully captured a seat near the door which a Gargantuan Italian had just previously vacated. Sinking into it with relief he crossed his legs and stared contemptuously at the passengers opposite him.

"Vulgar and stupid people," he muttered to himself. "What do they know of art and science and the splendor of antiquity?"

Mr. Benefield's mind was quite well informed in regard to antiquity. He had visited Egypt and explored all of the ruins that are to be found in that magnificent and grievously exploited land; he was familiar with Tibet and its glamorous mountain monasteries; he had poked into forbidden volumes in the libraries of central China and climbed the Andes to stare at the colossal stone monuments left by the pre-Incas for the edification of mere superior Nordics. And incidentally, he had spent seven years at Yale and emerged with a Ph. D. and a conviction that archeology was a sacred science and that there were more things in it than are dreamed of in our vulgar philosophies.

But unfortunately Mr. Benefield was now unhappily married and financially harassed and was no longer able to devote himself as exclusively as he might have wished to his favorite science. In fact, his personality had become distorted through suppression. He still took his archeological researches seriously, which was commendable, but for several months now he had been interesting himself in less savory pursuits, pursuits which intelligent men in the third decade of the Twentieth Century do not ordinarily approve of, and his academic colleagues had ceased to regard him with unqualified respect.

Indeed, several of Mr. Benefield's recent utterances—the statement that he believed in vampires, for instance, and that Haitian voodooism was not a thing to be lightly sniffed at—had even alienated a considerable number of his *imaginative* friends. Mr. Benefield had actually become, in his less

lucid moments, a kind of eclectic theosophist. He did not care for the didactic and sugary mysticism of Madam Blavatsky and he despised the modern exponents of her cult, but he shared the mystical credulity of the poet Maeterlinck and the mediæval, albeit not precisely the religious, bias, of such contemporary reactionaries as Chesterton and Belloc. In brief, he believed that life is a mysterious business and that we know very little about it. Certain fragments of Aurignacian Venuses which he had diligently collected in the rock caverns of the Pyrenees had confirmed him in this hypothesis.

But now as he sat in the subway en route to the Bronx he was not thinking of Aurignacian Venuses. He was not even thinking of the Jeelos of the Dolmens that occupy so many fascinating pages in Lucian Brown's scholarly brochure. His mind was wholly taken up with the people opposite him. They were returning his stares with an avidness that somehow horrified him.

They were looking at him as though they were convulsed with curiosity; almost as though their eyes were being drawn from their heads in his direction by some power exterior to them.

It is true that Mr. Benefield was, in some respects, an odd-looking man. His hair was absurdly long and it descended upon his forehead in a circular, antiquated bang; his hat was two sizes too small for his immoderately large head — a brachycephalic head, although he boasted twenty generations of Saxon forebears—and his socks, which his wife had purchased for him, were of heavy wool, and unsupported by garters they bulged above his shoes like the elephantine folds on the torso of an Abyssinian eunuch.

But these idiosyncrasies were not, in themselves, sufficient to account for the horrified expressions on the faces of his fellow-passengers. Mr. Benefield wondered if by any chance he had neglected to shave before leaving home that morning. His beard was unusually prolific and one day's neglect was sufficient to render it a faintly conspicuous object. Not so conspicuous, indeed, as the fallen hose or antiquated bang, but Mr. Benefield was supremely unconscious of his general ludicrousness. It was merely his beard that worried him, and to make certain that he had really shaved—his memory failed to record the act—he raised his right hand and passed it slowly over his chin.

His chin was wet and dripping! Mr. Benefield snatched his hand away and stared at it in horror. Upon his palm lay a moist, black, inexplicable smudge. A gelatinous smudge.

He coughed uneasily. He had no recollection of having passed under a dirty drain, but under something of the sort he must, of necessity, have walked. "From one of the tall buildings," he muttered, under his breath. "It rained yesterday and the wind has blown the filthy water out of the drain onto my face. I must be a ludicrous spectacle indeed. No wonder they are staring at me!"

His dignity would not permit him to remain in his seat after this distressing discovery. Rising hastily he passed to the rear of the car, and concealed himself in a corner of the vestibule.

THERE were only two other persons in the vestibule—a child of seven and its elderly nurse.

The child saw Mr. Benefield first. It stared for a moment in abject terror; then it buried its frightened face in the folds of its guardian's coat. "Black bogy man!" she screamed. "I wanta get off!"

Instantly the nurse raised her face. For a second she gazed at Mr. Benefield in sheer incredulity; then distress deepened to terror in her eyes, and with a scream she seized the child

by the arm and retreated into the car.

Forunately for Mr. Benefield the car at that moment arrived at his station and he was able to elude the onrush of curious passengers that promptly ensued. Dashing wildly across the platform he ascended the stairs to the street and hurled himself into the adjacent darkness.

The darkness was soothing; it was Gilead to his impaired pride. He strode through it in silence, literally wrapped in it, his mind for a moment enjoying the quietude that precedes a storm. He hadn't dared to touch his face again.

He hadn't dared, but in a moment he would dare. The darkness was rapidly restoring his confidence and in a moment he would dare anything. He was conscious of a dim power stirring within him. But at the same time he experienced an overwhelming sense of discomfiture, of constriction. His clothes, he felt, were stifling him. It was absurd that he should be stifled by that hideous stiff thing that encircled his neck. What was it called? Ah yes, a collar! He had almost forgotten the name of it, but remembering suddenly he ripped it off and threw it upon the pavement. Then he felt his face again. It was slimy, blubbery. His hands slid over it.

"Good God!" he gasped, and began to run. He must reach home as quickly as possible and wash from his face the unspeakable filth that had descended upon it!

He ran for fully five minutes, and arrived at the door of his lodging completely out of breath. As he fumbled hectically for his keys he experienced an overwhelming sense of horror, and of shame, which was paradoxically mingled with a wild and turbulent rebelliousness. It was as though he had suddenly, in some hideous and unnatural manner, broken the mold of humanity in which we have been cast. It was almost as though—he couldn't express it precisely—as though he had become a sharer of some esoteric and limitless divinity, and might experience every mundane emotion simultaneously; as though all the pleasures and all the agonies in a human life-span might be his in a single instant, and also pleasures and pains that have no counterparts in the world we know.

And then—Mr. Benefield saw a face in the glass panel before him that defiled the exterior of the door. Instantly his whole being became flooded with an unearthly, paralyzing fear, with a consuming and overpowering revulsion. The soft, fleshy feel of his face had vaguely suggested the abnormal, but this, this, *this*——! It wasn't, dear God, it wasn't even anything human that stared back at him.

Not human. Not human. It didn't even remotely resemble a human face. It was covered with thick, dark hair and where its mouth should have been——

Mr. Benefield recoiled before the awful horror of the thing. His brain had gone cold; he could not swallow. Slowly, dumbly, he raised his hands and gazed at them. It was as he had feared. The—the claws were very long. Quickly he unsheathed them in the heavy folds of flesh on his moist black palms. Almost—a stab of terror crossed his face as he made the acknowledgment in that moment of torture and doubt—almost he preferred the face. The face—had eyes. At least eyes. *His* eyes. But could he swear to that? Even now, as he stared hysterically into them they seemed—to melt. To melt and merge with that awful face.

Familiar thoughts were forming in a brain that was no longer wholly his. He knew that the brain was no longer in its entirety his brain because with the phrases he recognized were mingled obscene and outlandish syllables derived from some hell-

ish idiom that was sufficiently Gaelic in its sibilants to be perhaps very vaguely comprehensible to him. Or if not actually comprehensible, at least damnably suggestive.

"Ushtey Doinney! Kea! Doinney! The overcoat! The overcoat! It isn't yours. *He* wore it. *Dei Ai. Sinthat.* Rutilius—Rutilius Namatianus knew. *He knew.* They do not die. The coat! The coat! For God's dear sake, take it off! Don't you understand. *Doinney Ushty.* He, the *Druid*—a Vate—in the library. In America, yes, yes! They do not die."

With a tremendous effort of will Mr. Benefield seized the lapels of his overcoat and sought to take it off. But in the glass the *thing* did not approve. Its eyes shone with a malign lust and from the cavern in its dark face black saliva dripped.

"Gush—ur!"

Almost Mr. Benefield succumbed to its obscene plea. Almost he craved to wallow in rapture unspeakable in the unclean sty where—but no, no, it was unthinkable. A voice roared within him.

"It's damned Celtic superstition. The Romans drove the little people into the hills; with steel and flame they slew their dark gods. They spat upon the Vates and the Bards. The Saxons and the Normans spat too! And you? Their blood is in you. Slay! Laugh! You are a scion of the invincible races! No Vate can withstand you. Slay their priests."

There came to him then a sudden sense of power. It was as though all his forebears—Romans, Saxons, Normans, Danes—had suddenly come to life within him, and were urging him forward, shrieking into his ears: "Fight, fight! For Cæsar, for Arthur, for clean gods and brave, for valor, and mercy and your very soul!

With a shout so tremendous that it seemed scarcely even by derivation Benefieldian he tore off his outer garment and hurled it furiously from him. *"Eadem qua te insinuaveris retro via repetenda est!"* he cried. "You—you cringing Celtic obscenity!"

He hurled the malediction directly at what he thought had become himself. But when he looked again, when he peered with angry, defiant eyes at the image in the glass he discovered that it had lost all of its loathsomeness. Whereupon his fury evaporated, as well it might, for the reflection of the original Mr. Benefield was scarcely an anger-provoking object. And the original Mr. Benefield it was that now stared back at him.

Mingled with the relief which he overwhelmingly experienced at this discovery was an unaccountable sensation of lassitude. He began, apparently, to exist in a kind of trance. Getting out his keys he opened the door and passed almost unconsciously through the vestibule and up two flights of stairs to his room. He wondered vaguely if his wife would reproach him for coming home so late. If she knew—but no, he would not tell her. The experience was already receding in his mind. Even now he doubted it and in time it would perhaps be forgotten even by himself. And he was so very tired—the fragmentary vestige of his reason that remained on its throne warned him that it would never do to argue with his wife or attempt to explain anything to her. Only sleep could restore his shattered psyche; and he must contrive somehow to get into his bed unobserved. It was a curious world—a very inexplicable and curious world, and if people were as intelligent as certain misguided fools believed they would not ask questions about—well, Druids, or for that matter, about anything. They would accept everything as proved, Q. E. D., and simply go to sleep—like contented, well-nourished cats.

UNFORTUNATELY Mr. Benefield was not permitted to sleep uninterruptedly until ten o'clock, his usual hour for rising, on the following morning. At eight minutes to nine he was awakened by his wife, who exclaimed: "That silly old creature across the hall, Mrs. Harmone, just got me up to tell me a crazy story. She has been idiotically frightened, and she says there was a burglar in the house at about eleven o'clock last night!"

"A burglar?" inquired Mr. Benefield sleepily. "How dreadful!"

"Yes, dreadful—and very queer if true. What do you think the man did?"

"I can't hazard a guess." Mr. Benefield's emotional self was still deeply immersed in sleep, i.e., in his subconscious, and he spoke with cool intellectual detachment.

"He was tall and very, very thin and he climbed in by the parlor window. Mrs. Harmone was dozing in a chair near the center of the room and she saw him. She didn't dare scream for fear he would shoot her. She simply sat and watched him, trying not to breathe. He went right through the parlor and out into the hall. And a moment later she heard him close the front door. He came in the window and went out the door!

"Wasn't that unusual—for a burglar?" murmured Mr. Benefield.

"Mrs. Harmone thought so. And as soon as he shut the door she dashed toward it, and peered through the curtains at him.

"What do you think? *The man had left his overcoat on the porch,* and he was bending over to recover it when Mrs. Harmone peered out at him. While she watched him he put it on. His back was turned toward her, but she said—his head looked very queer. Nasty, she said. It gave her the shivers. He wore an English bowler hat, which covered most of it, but his ears, she said, stood out. And they were very black—and pointed!"

"Pointed!" echoed Mr. Benefield. He was fully awake now, and experiencing an acute and lively horror.

"Actually — pointed. Or so she claims. And then, she said, he descended the stairs and went shuffling off down the street. She went out on the porch and watched him until he turned the corner. And then, she said, she had to go in, because there was such a horrid, fearsome odor—like you smell at the Zoo, in monkey-houses, she said. Then she frowned, and shook her head. 'But it wasn't a monkey smell exactly. It was more like—more like snakes!' "

Mr. Benefield groaned and clutched valiantly at a straw. "I think," he affirmed, "that Mrs. Harmone's nervous energy is unfortunately discharged through the efferent channels of those sensori-motor arcs which comprise what neurologists would call the focus of cortical awareness. She visions things which are scarcely present to the senses."

"She imagines things, you mean?"

"Yes, my dear. That expresses it quite succinctly. She imagines things. Now, please do not wake me for another hour."

Mr. Benefield turned upon his side and went resolutely to sleep. But in the dream that immediately ensued he encountered the very thing that he had hoped to avoid and was obliged, perforce, to pay subconscious tribute to the veracity of Mrs. Harmone. "God's Death!" he shouted, as he tracked it to its lair in a hellish wood. "Does a Knight of Malta fear such as you?"

The DEATH LORD

By EDMOND HAMILTON

"From the automatics a stream of fire flashed across the room."

"TO THE Peoples of the Earth:

"I hereby announce to you that I, the Death Lord, have resolved to take over the rule of Earth. It is my will that before May 15th the governments of Earth make public acknowledgment of their submission to my rule, when my wishes will be made known to them. If this is not done I will upon that day give Earth an earnest of my powers by loosing death on the city of Chicago.

"THE DEATH LORD."

It was in that brief message that the Death Lord first made himself known to Earth and Earth's peoples, on May 10th. A copy of that message, neatly typewritten upon a single plain sheet, was on that day received by each of the leading newspapers in almost all the world's great cities, in New York and London and Paris and Tokio and Moscow. The envelopes in all cases bore a New York postmark, and it was evident that they had been mailed at calculated intervals so that all might be received in all the world's great cities upon the same day. It was only long afterward, however, that these facts concerning the coming of

the first message were discovered, since at the time that message was accorded no serious attention whatever.

The treatment of it by the New York newspapers was typical. Most of them disregarded it completely. The four journals that did reprint that message in all cases treated it with the satiric playfulness of the modern humorous reporter. The *Globe* made a mock-serious reference to the riskiness of life already prevailing in Chicago. The *Period* hit it off humorously in an open letter suggesting some needed changes to the would-be world ruler. The *Gazette* and *Inquirer* together commented sarcastically upon the desperate expedients being put into practise by motion picture press-agents, though the publicity departments of the film companies instantly denied all connection with it.

In Chicago the treatment accorded the message by the press was much the same, it seeming too obviously the work of a crank to merit any more than a passing comment. Such messages and threats, bombastic with delusions of grandeur, are common enough in newspaper offices, and so this one was for the most part dismissed entirely from attention by the newspapers that received it. Abroad, the London journals, in the gravity of a new reparations crisis, ignored the thing entirely save for a caustic reference or two to American megalomania, and so too did the puzzled European and Asiatic press. By the day after its reception it was probably completely forgotten by all concerned, not to be brought back to mind until there came four days later that appalling and unprecedented tragedy that descended upon Chicago like a bolt from heaven.

It was in the newspaper offices of New York, strangely enough, that the first intimations of the Chicago catastrophe reached the world at large. It was first made manifest in those offices late on the morning of the 15th, by the abrupt and inexplicable silencing of all their telegraphic connections with the Chicago press bureaus. Their instruments and telewriters, that had been clattering casually through the morning, suddenly ran into incoherent words and letters and then stopped. At first, of course, the thing was laid merely to line trouble between the two cities, but it became evident that it was of a more serious nature when a call to the telegraph offices elicited the information that all telegraphic and telephonic circuits to Chicago and its connecting suburbs had gone suddenly dead, and that cities north and south and west of the inland metropolis reported the same sudden breaking-off of their communications with it. It was swiftly ascertained, also, that two Chicago radio stations that had been broadcasting morning programs had abruptly gone silent at the same time. It was quite evident, therefore, that only some major disaster could have silenced the great city so completely, and excitement in the newspaper offices at New York swiftly rose.

Tensely their staffs gathered in and around their telegraph rooms while their operators strove with clicking instruments to pierce the veil of silence that had so suddenly enwrapped the great city. By then word of what had happened had penetrated into the city outside, and New York's streets were crowded soon by masses who waited in semi-excitement for news. The more immediate connecting suburbs of Chicago, it was found, were as silent to the operators' call as the city itself, but after a period of tense effort it was found that Gary was the nearest point to Chicago with communication still intact. The operators at Gary, when reached, could say only that the silence of all Chicago communications was a complete mystery to them also, but that wild rumors were afloat in the city and that its authorities had sent out four of a commercial company's am-

phibian planes to Chicago a little before to ascertain the reason for the complete cessation of communication with it. For more than an hour, therefore, the newspapers and the excited gathering crowds in New York, as in many another city by then, waited. Then at last, at noon, came word that the planes sent out to Chicago from Gary had returned, and that they had brought back with them news astounding, incredible, awful.

Chicago had become suddenly a vast city of the dead!

That was the news that the returning planes brought with them. They had swooped down over the city, the pilots reported, and had noticed first that even in its outermost reaches was a strange stillness, a strange absence of motion. There were no moving crowds, no hurrying automobiles and trolleys, none of the usual morning stir, but only a complete silence and stillness. And as they had slanted lower across the midtown section, down over the buildings and along the lake-front, they had seen the reason for that. For in the boulevards and streets and ways beneath them were lying in haphazard masses tens of thousands of the city's peoples, motionless and dead, stricken down over all its vast extent as though by a single sword of judgment. Automobiles were jammed in the streets in massed wreckage, their drivers dead at their wheels. Trolleys with dead motormen and crowds of dead passengers stood where their safety controls had stopped them. Small and large boats along the lake's shore were drifting rudderless with crews sprawled motionless upon them. The whole vast city, from the silent lakeside to its outermost reaches, seemed stripped clean of every spark of life.

The four stupefied pilots, though dazed by the awfulness of that which lay beneath them, had after a little hesitation circled down and landed in the lake at the city's edge, and then had clambered up across the green little dividing park to the broad sweep of Michigan Boulevard. There, on sidewalks and in wrecked cars and at the entrances of the great buildings along the street, only dead had met their eyes, and when they had examined the nearest of those sprawled masses their minds had reeled still further. For those dead thousands were twisted and swollen and distorted by the agonies of Earth's most dread diseases. Some lay with drawn and wasted faces as though dead from months of the ravages of tuberculosis. Others were twisted with the strange and torturing agonies of tetanus. The faces of others were lemon-colored from the dread striking of yellow fever. And still others had the congested faces and oddly open mouths of pneumonia victims. Countless numbers of them there were, too, that were dead from diseases or combinations of diseases that the stupefied pilots could not identify. And, strangest and most terrible of all, those dread diseases that take weeks —or days at the least—to kill, had apparently struck with such sudden power at Chicago as to kill every living being there almost in an instant!

The airplane pilots, staring along that great boulevard and along the masses of dead and wreckage that littered it, could see upward in the windows of the great buildings along it other dead, sprawling motionless here and there at the windows. An awful stillness and silence held all the city, and in the presence of those numberless dead in that awful charnel-city, the four felt their reason going, had only the strength to stagger back to their planes and up from that metropolis of silence and death, back to Gary. Before they had reached Gary, though, they had seen one of their number go unconscious in his cockpit, his plane whirling downward, but the other three, though assailed at the same time with dreadful sickness, had managed to land and choke out their news before unconsciousness had

seized them also. Physicians at Gary called to aid them stated instantly that the three had been stricken by a combination of a half-dozen or more deadly diseases of terrific force, contracted by their venture into the terrible plague city which Chicago appeared suddenly to have become. It could not be doubted, therefore, that a terrific death by disease had descended upon Chicago that morning, of such unprecedented and appalling power as to slay the city's millions without sparing a soul, in the very moment of its coming upon them!

WITHIN thirty minutes of the time that terrible news flashed over the wires from Gary to New York, screaming extras were being carried out and through crowds that whitened to read them. The news of the most awful disaster and death that had ever struck the races of men was flashing like light around the world to bring horror and fear into the uttermost cities of Earth. And with each moment, corroborating reports were coming in from the area around Chicago, of venturesome people who had penetrated into the city's outer limits to find it the city of dead millions which the pilots had described, with no living being there, the death that had descended having apparently wiped out all life in a circle of a score of miles, in the connecting suburban communities as well as in the city proper. And swift too came reports that those who ventured thus into Chicago's area of death and returned sickened almost at once with the dread diseases that had struck there. And though those who sickened were not slain instantly, it was apparent that Chicago had become a great plague-spot on the face of Earth, and that the dread diseases that had been loosed there so inexplicably and terribly might well sweep out and annihilate humanity!

For leagues around the Chicago area, indeed, by that afternoon, a great panic-stricken exodus of people was taking place, and that panic had begun already to spread swiftly to the nation, to the world, when it was checked somewhat by a swift proclamation flashed from the government at Washington. It was apparent, that proclamation stated, that a terrific death by dread diseases of unprecedented deadliness had been unloosed inexplicably at Chicago, and had slain that city's entire population. While this tragedy was appalling, there was no cause in it for nation-wide panic, since that inexplicable death had not struck anywhere else and measures were being taken to prevent the spread of it from Chicago. The entire stricken area had been put under martial law and troops were already detraining there to throw a cordon around it. Medical and sanitary supplies of every sort, with staffs of medical corps members and civilian physicians, were already being rushed toward that area to establish around it a rigid quarantine. And finally, since all the dread diseases that had struck at Chicago appeared to be germ diseases, the greatest bacteriologists of the nation were being summoned to consult together regarding the course to be followed.

This proclamation, which was at once rushed forth to the excited crowds in New York as in every city, calmed somewhat their first panic, though it could not eradicate all their fear. Already, they learned, the bacteriologists summoned were hastening toward New York for the proposed conference, which was to take place at the building of the Bacteriological Institute there. The head of that institute, the eminent Dr. Randolph Browner, was hastily returning by plane from a Midwestern lecture tour upon which he had lately started. His younger assistant, Dr. Walter Huston, was already rushing preparations for the conference. Professor Louis Despreaux, the noted bacteriologist of Classon University at New Orleans,

was on his way to New York by plane also, and so too was the equally noted Professor Herman Braun, of Kansas City University, and Dr. David MacCallan, of the Montreal School of Science. The sixth summoned, the bulky and brilliant Dr. Robert Haddon, of the Philadelphia Foundation, had already reached New York, and it was believed that this half-dozen of the nation's most prominent bacteriologists would, when they assembled, be able to determine quickly the best method of meeting the menace.

Late on that first day of terror, the 15th, men with special protective equipment had dared into the awful charnel of death that Chicago had become, and had taken therefrom the specimens of germ-impregnated air and water and flesh required for bacteriological analysis. These had been rushed by plane to New York, where young Huston and some others at the Bacteriological Institute had analyzed them during the night. So that when, late on the morning of the 16th, the six bacteriologists gathered in one of the building's offices for their conference, young Huston was able to state to them, briefly and clearly, that the specimens taken from Chicago indicated the presence of the germs of almost a half-score of Earth's most dread diseases, of tetanus, pneumonia, yellow fever, malaria, and others. It was certain, he stated, that those germs existed there in unprecedented thickness and virulence, and he added the astounding statement that those dread germs seemed to have developed suddenly in the bodies of all living things there in such numbers, slaying those living things instantly without need of days to penetrate their bodies and blood and organs! Most important for the moment, though, was the certainty that Chicago swarmed thick with the germs of Earth's most terrible diseases in unimaginable thickness, and with that certainty before them Dr. Browner and his five fellow bacteriologists swiftly made and issued their decision.

Chicago must be burned!

The great city could by no means be purified of the dread plague save by fire. No human efforts could in the short time required cleanse the city of the unseen germs of death that lurked thick within it, and the longer its millions of dead lay unburied in its streets and buildings the greater grew its menace. Whatever unprecedented condition had loosed death upon it, it was certain that the city and all its dead must be burned if that death were to be prevented from spreading. And when Dr. Browner issued that decision, sentencing the second greatest city on the continent to annihilation, there was in all the nation no word of criticism of that decision. For so great was the fear that had gripped the nation and the Earth that crowds would have torn limb from limb anyone who might have suggested opposing the bacteriologists' advice.

But none there was who suggested it, and within hours after Dr. Browner had issued the bacteriologists' statement a half-hundred planes were flying from east and west and north and south toward Chicago, a half-hundred great bombers whose racks held hundreds of great incendiary bombs. Back and fourth over the mighty city, lying silent and still and terrible in the death that enwrapped it, the planes flew, dropping here and there their great bombs that splashed red flame on all sides and that in moments had set great blazes sweeping outward from them. By the time the planes had flown back, a mighty column of black smoke was visible for miles away where Chicago had been, a gigantic cloud that was the death-pyre of the vast city and of all the millions that had lived within it. Through the last hours of that day that vast column poured skyward, while the distant watchers gazed in awe, and when night came their awe

deepened, for then the cloud of smoke became slashed with fire, with crimson flames sweeping up gigantic, the whole sky quivering for hundreds of miles with the glare of fierce light from Chicago, going to its death. Through all that night it flared, and when morning came and the planes ventured back out over the giant waning smoke-cloud, they came back with the report that where Chicago and its dead had been lay now only a mighty plain of smoldering ashes and twisted, melted steel.

Around that great mass of ruins the troops had established their cordon, though none there were indeed that would have cared to enter that area. The first panic of the nation and of the world, though, had been effectually checked by the swift and drastic measures taken, and though severe epidemics of the diseases that had been loosed at Chicago were reported from other towns along the lake shore, they could be handled and limited by ordinary means. With this checking of the world's fear, therefore, its interest turned back to the little council of bacteriologists still assembled at New York, for it was that council's purpose to endeavor to ascertain what unprecedented conditions had loosed that awful and instant death upon Chicago. Already, indeed, with the first fear past, the catastrophe's cause was mystifying all Earth, since in all the memory of man had been no death by disease that had stricken so swiftly and with such awful and instantaneous power. Then, with sensational results, a score of newspapers in New York and elsewhere recalled the strange, forgotten threat of the self-styled Death Lord, and pointed out that the horror had descended upon Chicago actually on the very day on which his message had threatened to loose death there!

For a brief day this feature of the thing became the center of a terrified interest, and one exploited to the limit by the sensational section of the press. Was there then actually a Death Lord who had the power to release awful death upon a city and all its peoples? Had that threat that had seemed but a crank's message been really the ultimatum to Earth of a man with supreme powers of death? A few newspapers asserted that it was possible, and drew lurid pictures of a madman with bacteriological knowledge and a lust for power, preparing germ cultures in great quantities and scattering them through Chicago. These theories, however, were immediately shattered by a statement from Dr. Browner and his fellows in which they pointed out that such a picture was utterly false, since had germs been sown broadcast in Chicago they could not have created the effect that had taken place there. Such germs would have caused a great epidemic, they stated, in which thousands and tens of thousands might well have sickened and in time died, but they could never have slain every living being in his tracks, a thing which had probably been brought about by unknown natural causes and which was being closely studied.

THUS the more sensational theory of the Death Lord and his germ-scattering activities was dismissed, and newspapers and government agencies alike assured the populace that the message which had so oddly predicted the day of the catastrophe was a not unaccountable coincidence only.

Yet if Dr. Browner could thus aid his fellow bacteriologists in reassuring the world, it was evident to the other five that he was by no means so completely reassured himself, when they met again at the institute on the 20th. His strong face and probing black eyes, made more youthful in seeming by his black, ungrayed hair, were troubled as he faced the other five. Huston had referred to the quieting of the incipient fear that their statement

had achieved, but Browner slowly shook his head.

"We want no panic over this Death Lord business," he admitted, "but I wish I were as sure about it as that statement makes me out to be."

The others stared at him. "But you surely have no belief in that craziness?" the bulky Haddon asked. "You know as well as we that no germ-scattering could have caused that Chicago death-holocaust, that it was the sudden multiplying of the few malignant germs in all living bodies that killed all living things there so swiftly."

"But what caused that sudden multiplying of malignant germs?" asked Browner quickly. "That's unprecedented, unnatural entirely; no known natural condition or force could cause it."

"No known natural——" Haddon repeated. "Do you mean then that you think it was caused by human forces or means of some sort—that this Death Lord is someone who has found a force that causes malignant germs to multiply with unprecedented swiftness?"

"I think that it is possible," Browner said slowly. "After all, the discovery of such a force would not be unnatural. You know that the force in the ultra-violet rays or vibrations of sunlight kills malignant germs swiftly. Why, then, shouldn't there be a different vibration or force, of different frequency perhaps, that should have the opposite effect, that should cause the germs to multiply with immense rapidity? You'll remember that Dr. Clarence Garnett, who used to be here with us at the institute, always held that there was actually such a force or vibration and that some day it would be discovered. And, if you remember, at the time that Dr. Garnett disappeared so unexplainedly two years ago, he claimed actually to be on the point of discovery of that force. So that if someone has actually discovered it, it might be perfectly possible for him to have projected that force unceasingly out over the Chicago area until it had multiplied the few malignant germs in every living body to such a degree as to overcome suddenly all living bodies, to wipe out all life in that area."

Haddon shook his head. "It's too impossible, Browner, even so. For only a first-rate bacteriologist could discover such a secret, and bacteriologists, more than any others, as you know, have worked *for* the peoples of Earth and not *against* them."

Browner regarded them gravely. "I hope that you are right and I wrong," he said, "for if ever a bacteriologist used his powers for the wrong he might well make such a reign of terror on Earth as it has never known, might well seek with those powers to bring Earth beneath his rule as this self-named Death Lord seeks to do. It may well be, after all, that that message and its fulfilment were but coincidence, and the message itself the work of some crazed mind. It seems so, indeed, when nothing more from it has been heard."

It seemed so, in fact, to the nation, and to the world, by then. The Death Lord and his warning were dismissed again as an elaborate and sensational performance on the part of some publicity-seeking madman, that had been accidentally fulfilled by that awful death by plague that chance had loosed at Chicago. Even the more sensational journals admitted that such was the only logical explanation. By then, indeed, the first fears of the world were so far allayed that, the spread of the death loosed at Chicago having been efficiently checked by the burning of that city, the world's interest and pity were turned back to the awful tragedy itself, and on that afternoon of the 20th the newspapers were filled almost wholly with imaginary reconstructions of the catastrophe. The only references to the Death Lord and his message were a few articles point-

ing out anew the impossibilities of that already-exploded sensation.

But that night the late editions of those same newspapers carried other news. Again to the newspapers had come a New York postmarked message, but this time it was reprinted upon the first page of each of those papers, and this time it was upon the tongues of all men.

To the Peoples of the Earth:

I have given you the earnest of my powers which I promised and on May 15th I loosed upon Chicago the death of which I am master. I command again that the governments and peoples of Earth acknowledge publicly their submission to my rule and await my orders. If they do not do so by May 25th I will upon that day loose death on the city of Philadelphia.

THE DEATH LORD.

2

IT IS in the record of young Dr. Walter Huston that one finds what is, on the whole, the most valuable and clearest account of that strange period of days that followed the reception of the Death Lord's second message. Young Huston, as a member of that little council of bacteriologists that the nation had summoned for guidance, and as immediate assistant to Dr. Browner, its head, had not only unsurpassed opportunities of perceiving the march of events in those days but also the technical knowledge to understand them. His brief narrative of the days following the second message's coming, while inclined to verge now and then into technicalities of small interest, does give a clear and comprehensive view of that time of chaotic discussion and dispute.

For those next days were, as Huston tells us, days of unprecedented controversy regarding that message. Had this second warning of the Death Lord been allowed to stand uncontradicted there would have been inevitably a great panic-stricken exodus of Philadelphia's inhabitants almost at once, since strong still in the minds of all men was the terror of that awful death of dread diseases that had slain Chicago's millions as though in a single breath. The newspapers, however, in publishing that message, had in every case belittled its importance and cast such doubt upon it that the first panic that might well have resulted from it was nipped in the bud. We know, indeed, that the few days immediately after the message's reception saw some thousands of its citizens leaving Philadelphia each day, but we know too that these would have been nothing to the numbers that would have fled from it had not the press checked any incipient panic.

It had already been shown, they pointed out, that this self-styled Death Lord could by no known means have been responsible for the Chicago catastrophe, and that the first message from him that had predicted that tragedy had been but a mere coincidence in fact. It was evident, they went on, that whatever twisted mind was responsible for the first message had now seized upon that coincidence and by sending another warning was endeavoring to persuade the world that he had himself been the agent of that dread death that had descended on Chicago. The pretense, the newspapers concluded, was too transparent for discussion. And in this conclusion they were supported by a new statement from the federal government, which not only echoed the assertion that there could be no real danger threatening Philadelphia, but added that despite this troops would be stationed there for the reassurance of its peoples. Also, it stated, Dr. Browner and his fellow bacteriologists at New York had agreed to proceed to Philadelphia before the day mentioned and make certain that no condition prevailed there that might cause a repetition of the Chicago tragedy.

With these emphatic reassurances before it, it is not surprizing that the citizenry of Philadelphia, and of the nation too, promptly set down that

second message as the work of a crazed mind, and as promptly, save for the few timorous thousands who drew the derision of the others by leaving, dismissed the thing from serious consideration. The little groups of khaki-clad soldiers stationed here and there throughout the city were, indeed, the only visible reminder of the thing, and even their presence was considered by the Philadelphians a highly unnecessary precaution. Young Huston, in fact, when with Dr. Browner and his fellow bacteriologists he arrived in Philadelphia on the 23rd, found no excitement whatever, and only the most moderate interest in that message of the Death Lord that had foretold the city's doom for two days hence. The thing, he said, was simply not taken seriously by any there.

To Huston himself, though, and perhaps to some of his fellows also, the matter by then appeared much more serious than at first. At the meeting the six scientists had held before departing for Philadelphia, Dr. Browner had reiterated to the others his belief in the possibility of the so-called Death Lord and in the powers he claimed, and had suggested that they issue a statement advising the evacuation of Philadelphia until the day named, at least, had passed. The others, it seems, were somewhat impressed by Browner's seriousness, but Haddon pointed out what was, indeed, the truth, that even if they issued such a statement it would at once be discredited completely by the press and by the government, which were intent upon avoiding any panic such as had threatened after the Chicago catastrophe. Also, as Haddon added, there was in reality no evidence that the self-styled Death Lord was other than some malignant crank, and their own trip to Philadelphia seemed but a wild-goose chase.

Dr. Browner had shaken his head. "God knows that I'll be the gladdest if this Death Lord business turns out a hoax," he told them, "but I can't overlook the fact that that first message *did* warn the world of the Chicago tragedy. And there remains, too, the fact that Dr. Garnett was, he claimed, on the verge of the discovery of a force that would multiply malignant bacteria swiftly, when he disappeared. And his disappearance never has been explained, and none now knows where Garnett is."

The others stared at him. "You mean to say," Haddon said finally, "that you think that Garnett—that this Death Lord——"

"I mean to say only that Garnett was on the track of that force that would have given the Death Lord this power he claims to have. Some of Garnett's experiments he showed me, then," Browner interjected quickly. "You remember Garnett—a silent, brooding type; what if his discovery of that force, his possession of that awful power, was behind his disappearance? What if he aimed, with that power, to become actually the Death Lord of all Earth?"

"But Browner, man," interposed the frowning MacCallan, "you don't actually think that even with that power any man could hope to become dictator of the world?"

"Why not?" asked Browner swiftly. "A man with that power would be a true Death Lord, a master of Earth's life and death. He would need only to send out such ultimatums as have been sent out, to destroy all life in city after city to bring Earth swiftly to its knees! And then he would never need to show himself to Earth's peoples, even, only sending his orders to their governments, orders that none would dare to disobey. A world dictator indeed, and one ruling the world with a sword of death!"

"But even if such a Death Lord there were, one with that infra-red force you mention for multiplying malignant bacteria, how could it be applied, how loosed upon city after city?" asked Braun, interestedly.

"That would not be difficult," Browner said. "He would need only, if he wished to destroy the life in Chicago as was done somehow, to set up a projector of his force somewhere in Chicago. When that force was turned on, vibrating out through a certain area or radius, it would inevitably and swiftly multiply in the bodies and blood of all living things the few malignant germs of various sorts found in all living, healthy bodies. There would be needed no hours, therefore, or days or weeks for the germs to penetrate those bodies—they would already be everywhere in them and thus death would be almost instantaneous for all living things in that area."

"And then if your hypothetical Death Lord wanted to proceed to the destruction of all life in Philadelphia," said Haddon, rather incredulously, "he'd move his projector there or set up a new one and repeat the process?"

"Undoubtedly," Browner answered gravely. "And for that reason, when we six go down to Philadelphia, we're going to take with us six of the ray-proof suits and helmets used in radiological work, and impervious to all radiated force. For if it is a Death Lord who looses this dread death by disease with his radiated force, he must use similar protection for himself, and the suits would enable us to meet him on equal terms."

The others had not answered to that but their unbelief was plain to Huston as to Browner. The latter, however, insisted upon taking with them the six clumsy and heavy suits, constructed of special fabric layers with interlinings of flexible ray-proof alloys of lead and other metals, and with their goggled helmets which were as impervious to all radiated force. A special air-tight rubber lining made each impervious also to all germ life outside, however thick, a small knapsack tank of highly compressed oxygen giving an independent air supply. When, with this bulky equipment as well as their other instruments, the bacteriologists reached Philadelphia late on the 23rd, the quiet and totally unexcited aspect of the city, which was paying no more attention to the Death Lord's threat than on the last days, made these elaborate precautions seem somewhat ridiculous.

Browner, however, went unchangingly ahead with his plan. That plan, as he had explained to the others, was to distribute the six of them in as many different observation posts at points in Philadelphia's midtown section. Each was to have the newly developed and highly efficient Jones-Darkel apparatus for detecting the presence and degree of prevalence of malignant germs, by the light-stain process. With these, on the 24th and 25th, each was to make tests each half hour, and should any find a sudden increase in the prevalence of malignant bacteria in his air and water and serum samples, there would be time to make that known and with that information released the evacuation of Philadelphia would be accomplished swiftly enough. So, on the morning of the 24th, the six separated, each to the little temporary laboratory prepared for him, to don his protective suit and make the regular tests.

THE temporary laboratory prepared for Dr. Browner was at the city's heart, in a room facing on City Hall square, while others had their posts in similar rooms in the city's midtown section, that of Huston looking down on the square green plot and intersecting paths of Rittenhouse Square, all being a comparatively short distance from each other. It was with some excitement, Huston tells us, that he took up his post that morning, and began his tests with the Jones-Darkel instrument. But soon, he admits, those tests became monotonous enough, for they showed no change in the normal bacterial condition of his samples. It was very hot, too, in the

heavy suit which Dr. Browner had insisted upon his wearing, and as he glanced throughout that morning and afternoon at the busy square and streets below, he more than half envied the carefree streams of people passing incessantly to and fro.

Through that day, however, when not occupied with the monotonous tests, he was setting up and consulting another instrument, one of the radioscopes developed in Roentgen ray work for the detection and measuring of radiated forces. The needle of this instrument swung now and then to indicate a force being registered, but these phenomena lasted for moments only and were apparently the result of normal Roentgen ray and other work going on in the city. Huston's half-formed theory had been that the radioscope might possibly register the infra-red germ-developing force to which Browner had referred, if that force actually existed and were used by the self-styled Death Lord. But he began to doubt whether it would do so, and by then had begun to doubt too the whole Death Lord business, despite Browner's seriousness regarding it.

Until late that night Huston continued the tests, however, with no unusual results, and after getting a few hours of uncomfortable sleep in the clumsy suit, he was, at dawn of the 25th, beginning again the Jones-Darkel tests, and wishing intensely that the day and its useless ordeal were over. Until afternoon he watched the crowds in the street and square below swelling in volume, the automobiles pouring through in greater and greater number, and his Jones-Darkel tester showed no more malignant germ-forms present than on the day before. Soon after noon, however, the needle of the radioscope swung far to one side of the dial, and held steady there, quite unlike the momentary disturbances of it on the day before. Interested, but with no thought of alarm, Huston watched it, turning after a bit for his next bacteria test. That finished, he found that the radioscope's needle still hung steady at the dial's side and for the first time it occurred to him what might be the significance of that.

Tensely he watched the radioscope, but still its needle clung steadily to that position, and then, suddenly aware that the time of the next test was upon him, turned swiftly back to the Jones-Darkel apparatus. For the next few minutes he was busy with it, was silent and unmoving for a long moment, and then straightened from its eyepiece, his face white. For the serum sample he had tested, which had been normal but a half-hour before, was swarming now, suddenly, with the malignant germs of a half-score dread diseases, swarming with them as never had he dreamed that bacteria might do! Trembling, he hastily changed the serum sample for ones of air and water, and within minutes more knew beyond doubt that the air and water and all things about him, apparently, were swarming with the germs of tetanus and pneumonia and yellow fever and a half-dozen other of Earth's most deadly plagues in unprecedented, awful thickness, the few malignant germs of those diseases present everywhere having been suddenly multiplied, almost in a moment, thousands of thousands of times!

For a moment Huston stared at the radioscope, whose needle had registered that unchanging force for the last hour, and then suddenly with a smothered cry was racing across the room in his clumsy suit, was throwing himself down the stairs to burst into the sunlit street outside. And as he burst out into that street he stopped, transfixed with horror.

For that street was a scene of such horror as never had he imagined. Before him, about him, the pedestrians that had been swarming busily the moment before along the street and across the paths of Rittenhouse

Square were staggering, were swaying, were dropping here and there in confused masses, in dozens, in scores, in hundreds! A wild babel of choking cries came from those stricken crowds as they swayed and fell, a vast hoarse cry that seemed to Huston in that stunned moment to come from far away over the great city's mass, to come from the other hundreds, the thousands, that he glimpsed staggering and falling far along the sunlit streets—falling into death as they were stricken unaccountably by that death, as there were developed in their very bodies and blood the awful swarms of malignant germs that smote them in that moment with those dread diseases! Some about Huston, as he stood there stupefied with horror, writhed madly in agony for a moment; others slipped down unconscious; others choked and staggered and stumbled, but every living being in sight was smitten in that dread moment!

In the streets before him grinding crash on crash came to his ears, the crash of scores of automobiles driving blindly this way and that as their drivers slumped at their wheels, as they mowed here and there through dying, falling masses of people or drove headlong into one another! From far away, from all of Philadelphia's far-flung structures, there came to Huston's hearing in that moment a vast grinding, crashing roar, mingled with the hoarse choked roar of the thousands upon tens of thousands falling to death within it! Then, as he stood petrified there with such horror as never man had experienced before, he became slowly aware, as though with an effort of all his senses, that the cries and crashing sounds had ceased, that there fell no more hoarsely screaming figures, that all about him were lying only confused, shapeless masses of sprawled bodies, with none moving in all his sight, with Philadelphia lying around him in a thick, terrible silence of that death which the Death Lord had promised to loose upon it!

HUSTON was never able, afterward, to remember clearly the moments that followed. He had a vague memory of staggering eastward, in his dark, clumsy suit, along that sunlit street littered now with the shapeless masses of the city's dead. He saw other dead in doorways, windows, glimpsed dead linemen suspended limply at one place from poles above him where they had been stricken at their work, a blue-clad traffic officer slumped at his post near by, all lying silent and still beneath the warm afternoon sunlight. It seemed to him, as he stumbled forward, that the silence was beating at his brain with gigantic hammer-strokes. He was aware when he reached the wider way of Broad Street, staggered northward along it, over the dead heaps there and between the great buildings stricken silent so swiftly, with all inside them transfixed in death's sleep. He knew that he clambered once over a great mass of wrecked automobiles that blocked his way, but could remember no more than that until he came slowly to the realization that someone had grasped him and halted his staggering progress, shaking him vigorously by the arm. Then as the mists of horror around his brain cleared he recognized Browner, in his own heavy suit and helmet, and saw that Braun and MacCallan and Despreaux were with him and that down the silent street of awful death toward them was running unsteadily Haddon, from his own post, all in their protective suits.

"Browner!" Huston cried hoarsely. "The Death Lord! The Death Lord!"

Browner's voice, muffled as it was through his helmet, was yet like cold steel. "Steady, Huston, for God's sake!" he said. "The Death Lord has struck—but he's still here, he must be here, and it's for us to find him!"

"Dying—dying in a moment before my eyes — hundreds — thousands!"

Huston cried incoherently, scarce heeding the other. "I found when the force was turned on, with the radioscope, but it changed nothing and I had no thought that it was the force we feared. Then, when that force had been radiating for almost an hour, the change suddenly came, the sudden multiplying of all malignant germforms. I ran to warn—but the people—falling by then in thousands——"

Browner gripped his arm. "It was the same with all of us, Huston," he said. "The germ-change was so instant that before we could get into the streets from our posts with warning of it the thing had struck. But you say you found when that force was turned on?"

And when Huston brokenly explained to him his idea of using the radioscope to detect it, Browner's eyes gleamed through the vision-plates of his helmet. "Then we know that the Death Lord strikes with the infra-red force we suspected, Huston, and that means that he can only be the man who discovered and experimented with that force!"

"Garnett?" asked Haddon, and Browner swiftly nodded. "There's no doubt, now. Garnett—the Death Lord—is somewhere in this city with a projector he's used to cast the germ-multiplying force upon it. Except for ourselves he can be the only living being in this city now, and unless we find him he'll win out of it to go on with this awful work of his!"

"Find him?" Huston echoed, and Browner swiftly reached in the great side-pockets of his heavy suit and drew from them six flat black automatics, which he quickly distributed to them. "I thought these might be needed," he said grimly, "though God knows I never looked for this. We'll start through the midtown section here, and capture or kill any living person you find in it, for that person can only be the Death Lord!"

Swiftly then the group separated, Browner and Huston starting northward along the wide street in which they stood, Haddon and Despreaux taking streets to the left and MacCallan and Braun streets to the right, all forging slowly northward, over and between the masses of dead and the splintered, buckled wrecks.

HUSTON was never to forget the hours of search in which they beat on through the great city's central streets and structures beneath the warm brilliance of the declining afternoon sun. The great city's far-flung streets lay cumbered with unending heaps of dead, lying in groups and singly, sprawled in strange, distorted attitudes where the awful plague-death had stricken them—a city over whose farthest limits there reigned an awful silence and stillness, a city of death peopled so shortly before by swarming hundreds of thousands, but peopled now only by the motionless bodies of those thousands, and by the germs of dread diseases that swarmed thick and terrible everywhere through it, and by the six silent men in their strange protective suits who ceaselessly were searching, searching, through its silent streets for the dread Death Lord who had cast his doom upon it.

Like the strange search of some grotesque dream that search seemed to Huston, as they beat on and on through the central section of Philadelphia for the man who they believed still lurked within it. Yet as the sun sank westward and they kept at their strange hunt, keeping in touch with each other by muffled calls, Huston found a fierce resolve gripping his horror-dazed mind, a resolve that steadied him and sent him searching on with sharpened eyes. Once he heard the silence broken and looked up to see a single airplane flying over the city from against the sunset, dipping down and flying low and then soaring up and away, and knew that already the awful news of the death that had stricken Philadelphia and the

surrounding area would be trickling out to the world to carry to it horror unutterable. But still Browner led them on in that strange hunt, forging grimly on though now the twilight was falling upon the awful city and no lights were gleaming out in it.

Strange and ghostly it seemed to Huston now, a city of unutterable horror, with the dead that piled its streets and the dusk descending upon it and the awful grim search in which they were engaged. For still, unceasingly, they were moving through the labyrinthine streets and structures of the central section, a little group of men beating through the deepening dusk in a last tortured hope of finding the one there who had loosed the horror about them. Huston knew, as he searched on and on, that soon darkness complete would be upon them, making that search hopeless, and he knew too that before many hours they must start their own escape out of Philadelphia and its germ-thick area lest their suits' oxygen-supplies be exhausted. Then suddenly, as he moved on through the darkling twilight, there came from somewhere to his left the quick crash of an automatic, and then a muffled cry in Browner's voice!

Huston rushed with pounding heart in that direction, leaping the masses of dead about him, and then saw Despreaux and Haddon and the others rushing likewise from their own streets into the narrow street where Browner had been searching. A dark figure came toward them through the dusk and they saw that it was Browner. He was panting, and pointed northward along the street to the intersection of a narrower one with it.

"Got away!" he cried. "Someone I glimpsed slinking through the twilight—someone who wore a suit something like ours! I fired but he got around that corner!"

"The Death Lord!" Huston cried, and the other swiftly nodded. "It must be! Separate and circle out northward—don't let him get clear!"

Instantly the six were separating as he cried, were running part to northwestward and part to northeastward to cut off the escape of whatever dark and sinister fugitive it was that Browner had glimpsed. As they ran on through the dead-cumbered streets the dusk was deepening further, and it seemed to Huston as he threw himself forward, automatic in hand, that the deeper darkness of the streets about him was alive with slipping shadows. He heard Despreaux running close behind him, heard the muffled calls of Haddon and Braun far to the left, and those of Browner and MacCallan behind, the six spreading into a circle that enveloped in itself swiftly that mass of streets and buildings in which the fugitive whom Browner had seen, the dread Death Lord himself, must still be. Then came a distant muffled call from Browner and they were slowly beginning to contract that circle, to move in toward each other, beating through streets and doorways and buildings as they did so, through the area of that circle.

The unrelieved darkness of night was all but upon them, now, the stars gleaming out indecisively overhead and strengthening swiftly in luster as the sky around them blackened. Tensely, with pistols in hands, Huston and his fellows contracted their circle, searching on and on as they did so, but at last, with complete darkness upon them by then, they had met, had searched through all that circular area without glimpse of any besides themselves, and had converged together at a street intersection. They halted a moment, a strange little knot of men in their clumsy suits, standing silent in the still and silent city of death upon whose sprawled dead and strange streets fell the calm thin starlight, that metropolis which the Death Lord had on that day made a necropolis, and out of which, out of their circle, they saw, the darkness had

enabled him to escape. Then, standing there, Browner thrust his weapon into his pocket, shook his head, his figure dark in the starlight.

"He's got away," he said solemnly, "and we can do no more in this darkness, can but get out of this city of death while we're able and prepare for the next blow, for the Death Lord has escaped, and God alone knows upon what part of Earth he next will loose his doom!"

3

IT WAS dawn of the next day before Browner and Huston and their four fellow bacteriologists won northward out of the death-smitten Philadelphia area, stumbling in their heavy suits still into a small New Jersey town which was outside the death area, they found, but which was almost entirely abandoned. And it was there that they learned first of the terror, the stunning wave of panic, that had swept over Earth when the first news of the Philadelphia horror had been flashed round it on the day before. Never, indeed, had there been such abysmal fear upon Earth as when that news went forth, for it heralded the dread knowledge that the Death Lord was indeed lord of that awful death by disease-germs that he had loosed on Chicago and now on Philadelphia. So all Earth trembled now as it contemplated the future with this madman of the unknown holding over Earth his fearful sword of death.

In that part of the nation around death-stricken Philadelphia, though, Huston makes clear, the greater horror of that knowledge was forgotten for the time being in the more immediate horror of the Philadelphia disaster itself. For, even as at Chicago, the thing had struck for a score of miles around the city itself, all the countless thousands in that area falling to death at the same moment as those in the city. When the inhabitants just outside the edge of that great circle of death had become aware of what had happened, had ventured into the death area and understood what dread plagues had struck there as at Chicago, there had taken place a swift and panic-driven exodus from all around it, southward and westward and northward, from all the New Jersey and Pennsylvania towns around Philadelphia itself. Through all that night of the 25th, while Browner and Huston and their four fellows had struggled northward out of the death area, that outward exodus from around it had taken place, attended by scenes of the wildest terror; so that when they made their way at last into the first New Jersey town outside the death circle they had found it almost entirely abandoned.

By then, though, the first troops ordered to the scene of this second catastrophe had reached that town, and to the commander of these Browner and his fellows, after soaking their suits with germicidal preparations and then doffing them, had made themselves known. Swiftly then, while the world reeled from the horror of the thing and men in London and San Francisco and Singapore whitened to read of it, Dr. Browner had taken charge of the activities outside the death area. Within an hour, in answer to his urgent messages, there were roaring toward Philadelphia from north and south and west score upon score of great bombers from the Eastern army flying-fields, laden with incendiary bombs that they soon were showering upon Philadelphia and the connecting New Jersey and Pennsylvania towns and cities that had gone into death in the area about it. Nor was there more questioning of that action than at Chicago, for all men knew well that even as at Chicago, Philadelphia had become suddenly a vast germ-thick city of plague, and

that the death loosed there would sweep out swiftly over Earth if not burned at once.

From the street of their New Jersey town, in which moved only hurrying brown-clad soldiers, Dr. Browner and Huston and the other four bacteriologists watched with grim faces the great smoke-cloud that was billowing up to darken the skies, the smoke-cloud in which a second of the world's mightiest cities was going to its death. Already, they knew, the troops and medical corps and volunteer physicians were rushing to establish around that great burning area of death a cordon that would hold within it the death by plague loosed there, but it was hardly of that peril that they were thinking as they gazed somberly southward.

"Chicago—Philadelphia—and what city next?" Browner asked grimly. "The thing nears its crisis! Garnett—the Death Lord—he will strike again and quickly, and again and again if need be!"

"There's no hope of finding him?" asked Huston desperately. "If we could but find him—get him, before another city goes to death!"

Browner was darkly thoughtful. "There is one chance of finding him," he said slowly. "I knew Garnett better than any other at the institute, and from something I remember I thing there's a chance for me to find him. But it's back to New York we must go—it was from there both those warnings were sent, and somewhere there must be the Death Lord's base."

So, in an automobile swiftly supplied them by the military heads now in command around the stricken area, the six started north again toward New York. All train service for far around Philadelphia, they found, was completely demoralized, and the countryside through which they passed was almost completely abandoned. The panic-stricken inhabitants, they learned, had for the most part fled, refusing to return nearer the death area, and great refugee camps had been established to care for them for the time being. There had been looting going on in the deserted cities, they found, and the troops posted in them had executed some scores caught in the act, martial law having been established for a great area around Philadelphia. Yet all of these things, all of this strange, panic-smitten countryside through which they made their way northward, seemed remote and unimportant to Huston. His brain was concentrated upon a single thought, upon the single man who was behind all this mad terror and who had loosed dread on the world even as he had loosed death upon two of its mightiest cities. The Death Lord—the Death Lord—the Death Lord. . . .

And when with Browner and the others he reached New York he found the mighty city convulsed, as all Earth was, by the terror that the Death Lord had cast upon it. Where would his death be loosed next, that death of dread diseases that smote like lightning from the skies? It was the sheer uncertainty of that that was most terrible. The destruction of Chicago and then of Philadelphia had dealt a smashing blow at the nerve centers of the nation, of the world, that had already brought ordinary business almost to a standstill, and this deadly uncertainty was completing the work. Already riots had been reported from a dozen cities throughout the nation, great mobs demanding that the nation's government acknowledge its willingness to submit to the Death Lord's rule before another terrible catastrophe struck. The government refused utterly to temporize, however, to treat with this dread enemy of humanity that the Death Lord had shown himself to be, but all men saw in those first few days from the rising temper and terror of the populace that unless that

government soon did so it would perish.

The fear that had spread over the nation had flashed out over the world, too. Mobs in London had urged the submission of the British government to the Death Lord before they too felt his wrath. There had been bloodshed in Glasgow when troops were called on to disperse a similar mob. A member of the French Chamber of Deputies who had urged the adoption of a resolution for considering the Death Lord's demand was attacked by other deputies on the chamber floor. A great religious revival in Russia saw in the Death Lord's advent the coming of Antichrist. In India and Egypt and lower China great rebellious movements were taking place, a rumor there having declared to the natives that a great and unknown ruler had arisen who was to free them. The world was in turmoil, on the brink of complete panic, and all men saw that it would require but another great blow before the wild fears of all peoples would make their governments give to the unknown Death Lord the public acknowledgment of submission that he demanded.

"The end is at hand," Browner had solemnly told Huston and the others, gathered again after their return in the lower Broadway building of the Bacteriological Institute. "The plan of Garnett—the Death Lord—rushes to its climax! One more terrific blow at Earth, and Earth's peoples will submit utterly to his will. And then, without ever showing himself to any, he can dictate Earth's rule by his messages from the unknown!"

"That such a thing should be!" Huston exclaimed. "That a scientist—a bacteriologist like Garnett—should loose such horror as he has on Earth, to set up himself as ruler of it!"

Browner shook his head. "It is terrible," he said. "Yet one can see too what must have been the workings of Garnett's mind when he found himself with that terrible force, that terrible power, that he had discovered. Bacteriologists have been the greatest of all servants to humanity, and humanity has treated them like servants—has neglected them, persecuted them, restricted them. Think then what this power to make himself Death Lord of the world must have meant to Garnett. A bacteriologist the master of the Earth!"

"And unless he is found he will be that," said Haddon. "You said there was a chance of finding him, Browner?"

Browner slowly nodded. "I think there is, but it is something that I must try alone. It's a million to one chance that I can find him, but if I can——"

In those next few days, therefore, the others had seen but little of Browner, who spent those days in a search or activity of which he would tell the others nothing, going out early each morning and returning wearily late each night. He was conducting his own search for the Death Lord, they knew, following that one chance of which he would tell them nothing. And others there were, while the terror of New York and of the world crescendoed to snapping pitch, who were searching through the city in desperation for the Death Lord. The bacteriologists had given to the city's heads their identification of Garnett as the Death Lord, and though that news had not been given out to a world already convulsed with fear, it had sent thousands of searchers hunting grimly and silently through the great city for the bacteriologist who had disappeared so strangely two years before.

So there passed thus five days, days of such mounting fear as the world had never known before, days in which that fear was intensified in Huston. Was there really a chance for Browner or those others to find

the Death Lord before he struck again? Knowing nothing of the progress of Browner's search, able only to watch constantly the rising of the world's fear in helplessness, Huston and Haddon and the others saw those days pass with an infinite slowness. In them, as in all men, the dread terror that the Death Lord had cast upon Earth was gripping them ever more closely with icy hands, and there came nothing of hope from Browner and the other searchers—nothing until the night of the 30th, when Browner came into their office in the institute out of the fear-wrapped city's night, more weary than ever they had seen him but with a new look of hope in his eyes.

"You've found something?" Huston cried, and Browner slowly nodded.

"I'm on the trail of Garnett—of the Death Lord—at last, I think," he said. "God send that I'm not mistaken, for the fear of the world is such that I think the end's at hand."

"But if you're on the trail he can be found now before he can strike again!" Haddon exclaimed.

"Tomorrow will tell," Browner told them. "Tomorrow I'll carry this chance of mine to its end, and if I can find the Death Lord——"

He broke suddenly off. Into the room from the streets outside had come to their ears a distant wave of dull sound in which his words seemed echoed. "The Death Lord—the Death Lord!" Now it was coming clearly to their ears, shouted as though by innumerable voices, the wave of torrential sound rising in hoarse intensity each moment outside. Strangely the six looked at each other there in the white-lit room, and then suddenly Browner was at its window, had flung open that window and all of them could gaze down into the narrow length of Broadway, but a story beneath them. As that window opened there rushed into the room an increased roaring of voices from outside that swirled about them in a rushing wave of hoarse sound. And as they gazed out and downward they saw that the street below, beneath its brilliant electrics, was crowded from wall to wall by scores, hundreds, thousands, of people throwing themselves through it in swift-swelling throngs, and shouting in mad fear!

Stunned, transfixed, they gazed out upon those swelling crowds rushing confused this way and that beneath, saw here and there automobiles beginning to race through them careless of those they struck, saw over all the city's titanic dark masses of buildings lights flashing out here and there as though in sudden alarm, heard whistles shrieking somewhere to east and west and bells ringing over the hoarse mingled shouts of those beneath. From far across New York was coming that awful roar of utter fear and as higher-pitched screaming cries came to their ears they saw that before and among the panic-driven thousands in the streets ran men with masses of newspapers in their clutch, throwing them this way and that and shouting something indistinguishable, spreading terror before and about them as they ran on. One of those folded papers shot upward toward their own window and swiftly Browner reached forth, caught it, spread it wide and for a moment examined it. Then, his face set, strange, he extended it to the others, and as the black headlines leaped to their eyes they saw in huge type beneath it the message that the newspapers had sent roaring forth in a last warning:

To the Peoples of Earth:

Twice I have struck Earth and Earth's peoples with death, at Chicago and Philadelphia, and still the governments of Earth have not acknowledged submission to my will. Therefore without further warning I will loose death on Earth's cities one by one until that submission is made. The first to die is New York and this night, now, I loose death upon New York and the area around it as a herald of the death that shall be released upon all Earth's peoples.

THE DEATH LORD.

The six men stared at the paper in silence for a moment, a silence in which the dull, waxing roar of the thousands surging through the streets outside seemed unutterably distant, remote. And then the dull sound of Haddon's voice——

"The end," he said quietly. "The end at last—when that force of the Death Lord's is turned on, an hour of it will see the great change, the multiplying of malignant germs, the death of all the city's millions before they can escape its area. The end—and the Death Lord wins."

"Not yet!" It was Browner who cried, his eyes flashing. "There must still be a little time before that change comes—time for me to find Garnett—the Death Lord—if that chance of mine succeeds, and turn off his force before the change, the death, comes!"

Huston rushed to his side, the others with him, but Browner waved them back. "No, Huston!" he commanded swiftly. "If I can't succeed in this alone no number can. The suits—the protective suits! I'll try in one and you wear the others — to escape in them if my chance fails!"

Instantly Huston had raced to the laboratory behind the office, was jerking out one of the heavy suits and helmets, into which Browner swiftly climbed. With it on him he pulled the automatic from its pocket, examined its loads swiftly, then spun toward the door. A moment he stood framed in it, a strange figure in the clumsy suit and helmet, but with his eyes meeting theirs through its vision-plates, his hand out toward them. Then he was gone, down the stair and into the mad crowds in the street below that in their terror paid no heed to his strange-garbed figure as it rushed through them. For moments Huston and the others stared, there at door and window, the hoarse panic-laden shouts from far over the city and all the noises of its vast convulsion of terror loud in their ears, and then they had turned, were racing back into the laboratory. There for moments more they struggled into their own protective suits, and hardly had they done so when Huston was turning swiftly toward the radioscope upon one of the laboratory's tables.

It registered no radiated force, he saw in a swift glance, but as Haddon and the others, in their own suits by then, reached his side, he uttered a cry, pointed to the radioscope's dial. The needle had abruptly swung far over to the dial's side—had swung over as Huston had seen it do at Philadelphia when the infra-red germ-multiplying force of the Death Lord had been turned on there.

"The force!" he cried. "The Death Lord's force—he's turned it on, and in another hour the sudden increase of malignant germs will take place in every living body in New York and around it—in another hour all save ourselves will die as at Philadelphia!"

"God, the millions here!" The exclamation was wrung from Haddon. "Falling in death here as at Chicago and Philadelphia, if Browner's chance fails!"

"And if Browner fails, if New York dies, it means all Earth under the Death Lord's rule," MacCallan said slowly. "It means the Death Lord's plan triumphant while we wait here helpless, while we——"

"But no!" Huston it was whose cry broke in upon him, his eyes suddenly wide as he gazed at the radioscope's dial. "A chance for us to act too—I just thought—the radioscope here, if we took it out of here, moved north or south with it, or east or west, its needle would show by the intensity of the force registered whether we were approaching or receding from the projector of that force! And that way we might yet locate the Death Lord's projector!"

Haddon's eyes lit, and he and the others uttered exclamations. "It *is* a chance—a chance for us too!", he cried. "If we could locate that pro-

jector and turn it off, turn off the force before the great germ-multiplying change comes, we'd save New York from death yet!"

Swiftly, without further words, Huston grasped the compact black case of the radioscope, and then they were hastening down the stair of the building, through its deserted lower hall and out the institute's high doorway. There they halted for a moment. For now the street outside, beneath the flaring lights, was a wild mill-race of fear-mad humanity, of the city's thousands swirling along it and into the side streets to win out of the doomed city on which the dread plague of the Death Lord already was lowering, to win to the western and eastern tubes and bridges. To push their way through that swirling stream of panic-driven humanity seemed impossible, but swiftly the six massed together, Huston with the radioscope case at the center of their compact little formation, and then they were pushing out into that rushing stream of humanity, north along Broadway's length amid the shouting thousands around them.

TO HUSTON the whole wild shouting, roaring, trampling whirl of activity about him was one out of inconceivable nightmare, a boiling of all the city's life through its narrow streets by night in utter fear of the death upon it, but as he pushed north with his friends, that were buffeting and striking and forcing their way on, his whole soul was upon the needle of the radioscope he held. Fiercely he strove to keep the instrument level as they pushed on, and then when they had traversed a block's length of the narrow street it seemed to him that the needle that registered the intensity of the Death Lord's deadly force was creeping back a little. In the uncertain light from the electrics he could not be sure, but when they had pushed northward for another block, he saw that the needle had actually crept back with their progress northward.

"Back!" he cried to the others. "We're going away from the center of the force—from the projector. It's somewhere south of us!"

Swiftly they turned, and then were fighting their way back down the long street, against the rush of the panic-mad mob, which despite their strange suits and helmets paid them no attention whatever in the mad struggle of its members to win free of the city. And as they buffeted south again Huston saw the needle of the radioscope creeping forward again. On and on it crept, and then as they passed the door of the Bacteriological Institute from which they had emerged so shortly before, they saw that the needle was still creeping forward, indicating that the projector of the Death Lord's force was hidden somewhere still to the south. They were fighting now along Broadway's length through the tangle of irregular side streets that surrounded its southern length, the indicating needle of the radioscope still creeping forward. But as they passed the intersection of another of those side-streets Huston saw that the needle had paused, was creeping back as they went on.

Instantly they turned back to the side-street, which he saw by a glance was Barnett Street. Holding still to the compact formation, though here the crowds in the dark streets were less dense, they moved eastward along it, but again the needle crept back. They turned once more, moved westward along the side street, and the needle of the instrument crept still farther toward the dial's side, and now was quivering a little. On they went until again it had begun to drop back across the dial, and then they turned back, halted. They were standing at the intersection of the side street and another slanting narrow street that cut across it, and before them at the intersection was one of the brick buildings of eight to ten stories that lined the dark street, occupied

mostly by garment factories and other light industries. As the five drew closer out of the stream of hurrying fugitives fleeing through even this narrow street, though, they saw that the building directly at the intersection before them was in a sense a double one, facing on both of the intersecting streets. And as they stood beneath its walls they could see that now the radioscope's needle was quivering violently.

"The projector of the force—the Death Lord's projector—it must be somewhere in this building!" Huston exclaimed, and swiftly Haddon nodded.

"We've but minutes left to find it before the change comes, before the death strikes!" he said. "Huston and I will take this side of the building, and you, Despreaux and MacCallan and Braun, the other. Search it from top to bottom, and any mechanism you find running destroy instantly!"

Immediately the five had separated, Huston and Haddon hastening to the door before them and the other three to that facing on the other side. They found a watchman's light burning in the dingy corridors of the lowest level, and swiftly the two, with drawn automatics, penetrated into the long rooms on each side, snapping on lights there, glancing swiftly around, and then hurrying to other rooms. In moments they had gone through the ground floor of that half of the building, were racing up the stairs, the far dull roar from the great panic-stricken city around them becoming more remote to their ears, were hurrying through the divisions of the second level. They found masses of baled stores, furriers' steel-vaulted warerooms, dingy little packing-plants, but nothing suspicious and no living being other than themselves. Steadily Huston's hopes were sinking as they made their way upward through level after level, but still the radioscope's needle was quivering violently.

Somewhere close by them, Huston knew, was that projector of the Death Lord's that was casting its deadly force unceasingly out over New York and the area around it, yet within minutes the accumulated effects of that force, unless it were turned off, would be causing the great germ-multiplying change in all living bodies in that area, sending them all to death. He reached with Haddon the topmost level of the building, and with fast-waning hope went through its rooms, but at last had penetrated through all and had found nothing. Standing for a moment motionless in the long corridor that ran the length of the building's upmost level, they saw in a moment by the dim bulb that illuminated it three grotesque-clad figures like themselves approaching them down it, Despreaux and Braun and MacCallan, automatics gleaming in their own hands. For an instant Huston's hope flickered up again, but only for an instant, for as they came closer Despreaux held out his hands in a gesture that could not be misunderstood.

"Nothing," he said. "From bottom to top we've searched, and there's no sign of projector or Death Lord either."

"Then we've failed," said Huston, dully. "And Browner too must have failed, for the radioscope shows the force still radiating—to loose its death now in minutes—its deadly multiplied germs striking the millions around us with dread diseases in minutes——"

"Browner—all of us—failed," repeated MacCallan. "Then there's no——"

"Listen!" It was Haddon who with his muffled, hissed whisper held then suddenly silent. "Above us—that sound!" he whispered. "On the roof——!"

A moment they paused, tense, listening, and then Huston had heard the sound that had reached the other's ears, a low and steady beat-beat-beat hardly audible through their helmets.

An instant they stared wildly at each other, then silently were hastening down the long hall, to the metal stair that led to the roof. They climbed it, Huston's heart pounding, and then gently were opening the low door that confronted them, were emerging with drawn automatics onto the roof. That roof was illuminated only by the white starlight from above, but from it they could see far across that fear-mad city that was New York, with its mob-swarmed streets outlined by brilliant lights, with an unceasing roar of fear rising from all those fleeing throngs. What held the attention of the five, though, as they emerged, was the structure on the roof before them, one of the square low penthouse roof-buildings used on the city's roofs occasionally by small industrial concerns requiring the utmost possible daylight. The steel door of it was closed, and over the windows were steel shutters, but through a crack in one of those joining shutters came to them a ray of white light from within!

WITHOUT speaking they stepped softly toward the structure, and could hear clearly now the beat-beat-beat from within, and Huston could see that the radioscope's needle was almost jerking from the dial with its violent starts. They had found the projector of that force that was casting doom on the city, had found the Death Lord's hidden headquarters!

Gently Haddon tried the door, but it did not give. Gently too they moved around the building, but could see that each window's shutters were secured by a narrow steel bar inside. One of those windows, the one from between whose shutters came the crack of light, they halted at, peering inside, but the crack was so narrow that they could make out only a narrow section of the white-lit room within, glimpsing dark mechanisms within it. Huston turned, his brain afire, but Haddon had leaped softly back to the stair and down it, emerging in a moment again with in his grasp the heavy fire-ax from the fire-cabinet near the roof.

"Haddon!" whispered Huston frantically to him. "We've but a few minutes left!"

"This window!" Haddon whispered. "The only way—be ready when I break these shutters open!"

He raised the great ax over his head, his eye upon the crack between the two steel shutters, a crack of near an inch that permitted them to see the narrow steel bar inside that held those shutters closed. Huston beside him, pistol in hand, felt in that moment the whole strange scene impressed forever upon his brain, the vast city mad with panic and at the edge of doom stretching in the night around and below them, the dark structure on the roof before them, the gleam of the upraised ax and the pistols in the hands of the little knot of men behind him. For but an instant that scene held, and then Haddon, whirling the ax around his head with all the strength of his great arms, had brought it downward with all his force against the crack between the shutters, against the steel bar inside, like a falling brand of lightning!

Crash! The bar severed beneath that great blow, the steel leaves of the shutters swinging out, the glass window before them shivered to fragments by Haddon's ax as he and Huston leaped together up onto the low sill of that window! For a split second it seemed to Huston that every detail of the long white-lit room before him leaped out to him; the great gleaming motor-generators ranged in a row at one of its ends; the heavy transformer-coils and black boxes beside them; the black connections that crossed and recrossed in the room, and above all the tall square metal-shielded mechanism directly across the room from them, one upon whose front were ranged ten vertical glass tubes playing with pulsing,

lambent light, and from which came the beat-beat of power they had heard; the great projector of the force that would within minutes loose death by dread disease on all the millions about them! And standing between them and that great mechanism a single erect, startled figure, one garbed in a heavy protective suit and helmet like their own!

"The Death Lord!"

Even as Huston voiced that muffled shout, as Haddon and he and three behind them poised there transfixed in facing at last that dread Death Lord who had sent and was sending Earth's mightiest cities and millions of Earth's peoples to death, the dark figure before them had with a lightning-like motion produced and leveled a gleaming automatic upon them, before Huston could raise the gun in his hand! A single instant they held motionless thus with the Death Lord's pistol upon them, an instant in which Huston knew as though after years of reflection that never could he raise his own weapon in time before the other's lead tore through them there at the window. But in that instant Haddon, beside him, who had held the great ax still in his hand as they burst inward, with a swift motion had shot that hand forward, had sent that heavy ax flying forward across the room, past the figure before them, flying toward the great square metal-cased projector! It crashed against the vertical light-filled glass tubes on the projector's front, smashing them to fragments, and instantly there came a sudden gush of light from the smashed tubes' ends and the beat-beat of the great projector ceased!

In that moment the Death Lord before them, with a muffled cry, half turned, half spun around to the halted mechanism behind him. And as he did so, from the automatics of Huston and those behind him a stream of fire flashed across the room, and that strange-garbed figure in suit and helmet swayed and staggered and slumped to the floor! Huston heard in that moment the hoarse shouts of the others, and with Haddon was rushing across the room, to that slumped figure, was ripping from it the big protective helmet. Then, for a long moment, there was silence in the white-lit room, a silence unutterable in which they stared at that figure, with no word coming from them—no word until Huston uttered a choking cry, staggering against the others.

"The Death Lord!" he cried. "Oh, God!—the Death Lord!"

"The Death Lord—Browner!"

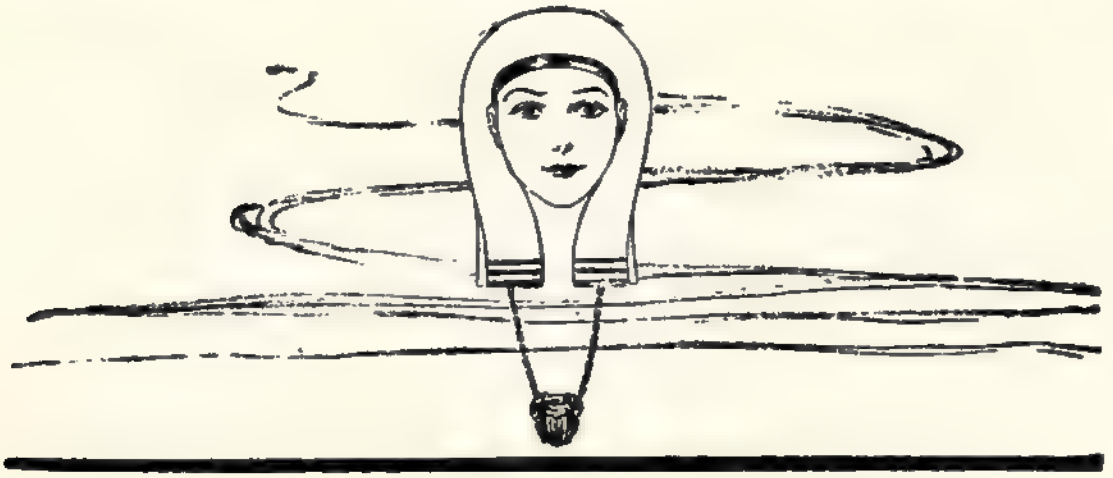
BROWNER'S face was marble-like as he stared up at them, blood welling from the breast of the heavy suit. To Huston and the others, reeling there above him, his voice came as a choking whisper. "A bacteriologist the master of the Earth!" he whispered. "I lose—but almost I won. Chicago — Philadelphia — and almost New York. It would have meant Earth's surrender."

He choked, stared at them with black eyes wide, was whispering again. "Garnett found it—the force—the infra-red force that multiplies malignant germs. Two years ago—at the institute—he brought it to me and I saw what power it meant. Bacteriologists the neglected servants of humanity, and now one could be master! It had been always my dream. Garnett refused—threatened to tell of my proposal—it was necessary to kill him. His body I annihilated—they couldn't understand his disappearance. I had the power then, the power to be Death Lord of the world, and I made my plans to use it. Projectors—projectors to radiate the deadly force—I made them, hid one at a laboratory I rented secretly at Chicago, another at Philadelphia, another here. When the time came I sent the first warning of the Death Lord here—started a fake lecture tour in the Midwest—was at Chicago and

turned on the projector that in an hour had loosed death there! I had suit, of course—protective suit—and escaped Chicago to return here, to take charge of the fight against the Death Lord! Who dreamed of finding the Death Lord in his greatest opponent?"

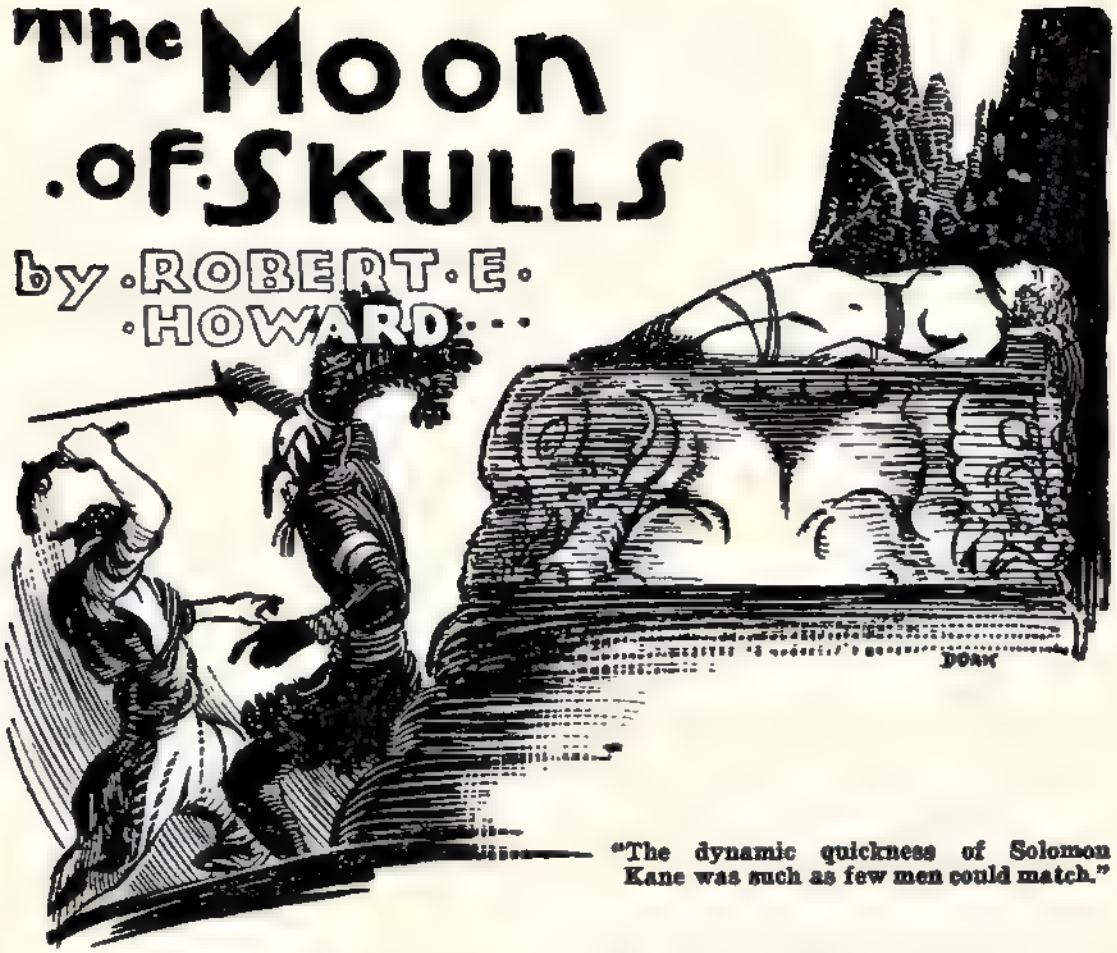
Again he choked, whispered inaudibly a moment, then more clearly. "So sent second warning of death for Philadelphia—and when we went there arranged separate observation posts for each of us. I needed only to slip out from mine and turn on projector hidden in secret laboratory near by, and then when it had loosed its death in an hour turn it off and slip back and into street. Search for Death Lord there a blind—and I never saw any there—fired shots for another blind. So came back here and when you thought I was searching for Death Lord I was preparing projector here—sending out another message today—and when that was broadcast by papers tonight rushing out as though to find Death Lord, but coming straight here and turning projector on. And if you hadn't found me—how did you find me?" His eyes flickered a moment to the instrument that Huston held still in his grasp. "Radioscope — I see — clever — it's beaten me, for if you hadn't found me I would have won. With New York's death the world would have given in—I'd never have needed to show myself, but could have ruled Earth from the unknown with my orders—a bacteriologist—the—master —of——"

He choked hard, fell quietly back, lay still. Huston, there beside him, was aware of the others staggering around him, of Haddon stumbling toward a Jones-Darkel apparatus on a near-by table, making a swift, unsteady test with Braun and then crying out crazily as they found no dread germs thick about them, as they found the multiplying of those germs prevented at the last moment. He was aware as dimly of Despreaux and MacCallan running down from the roof into the streets and their panic-driven throngs, of a vast mad shout of joy that came up to them from those streets, spreading far out over the city, as the two scientists shouted the news of the averted doom. These things he was vaguely aware of as he knelt there, but Huston could in that moment see nothing clearly save the wide and sightless black eyes of the man lying before him, nothing save the white and silent face of the man who had been Death Lord of a world.



The Moon of Skulls

by Robert E. Howard



"The dynamic quickness of Solomon Kane was such as few men could match."

The Story Thus Far

SOLOMON KANE, an English Puritan adventurer, searches for Marylin Taferel, who has been sold by her treacherous guardian to Moslem slave-traders, and finds her in the interior of Africa, where she is slave to Nakari, the black vampire queen of the nightmare city of Negari. Kane is captured, but escapes through a panel in the walls of the underground passages of Negari. Marylin is made ready to be sacrificed to Nakura, God of the Skull, at the full of the moon.

5. *"For a Thousand Years——"*

"The blind gods roar and rave and dream
Of all cities under the sea."
—Chesterton.

KANE slammed the hidden door shut behind him, jammed down the spring and for a moment leaned against it, every muscle tensed, expecting to hold it against the efforts of a horde of spearmen. But nothing of the sort materialized. He heard the black warrior fumbling outside for a time; then that sound, too, ceased. It seemed impossible that these people should have lived in this palace as long as they had without discovering the secret doors and passages, but it was a conclusion which forced itself upon Kane's mind.

At last he decided that he was safe from pursuit for the time being, and turning, started down the long, narrow corridor with its eon-old dust and its dim gray light. He felt baffled and furious, though he was free from Nakari's shackles. He had no idea how long he had been in the palace; it seemed ages. It must be day now, for it was light in the outer halls, and he had seen no torches after they had left the subterranean dungeons. He wondered if Nakari had carried out her threat of vengeance on the helpless

This story began in WEIRD TALES for June

girl, and swore passionately. Free for the time being, yes; but unarmed and hunted through this infernal palace like a rat. How could he aid either himself or Marylin? But his confidence never faltered. He was in the right and some way would present itself.

Suddenly a narrow stairway branched off the main passageway, and up this he went, the light growing stronger and stronger until he stood in the full glare of the African sunlight. The stair terminated in a sort of small landing directly in front of which was a tiny window, heavily barred. Through this he saw the blue sky, tinted gold with the blazing sunlight. The sight was like wine to him and he drew in deep breaths of fresh, untainted air, breathing deep as if to rid his lungs of the aura of dust and decayed grandeur through which he had been passing.

He was looking out over a weird and bizarre landscape. Far to the right and the left loomed up great black crags and beneath them there reared castles and towers of stone, of strange architecture—it was as if giants from some other planet had thrown them up in a wild and chaotic debauch of creation. These buildings were backed solidly against the cliffs, and Kane knew that Nakari's palace also must be built into the wall of the crag behind it. He seemed to be in the front of that palace in a sort of minaret built on the outer wall. But there was only one window in it and his view was limited. Far below him through the winding and narrow streets of that strange city, swarms of black people went to and fro, seeming like black ants to the watcher above. East, north and south, the cliffs formed a natural bulwark; only to the west was a built wall.

The sun was sinking west. Kane turned reluctantly from the barred window and went down the stairs again. Again he paced down the narrow gray corridor, aimlessly and planlessly, for what seemed miles and miles. He descended lower and lower into passages that lay below passages. The light grew dimmer, and a dank slime appeared on the walls. Then Kane halted, a faint sound from beyond the wall arresting him. What was that? A faint rattle—the rattle of chains.

Kane leaned close to the wall, and in the semi-darkness his hand encountered a rusty spring. He worked at it cautiously and presently felt the hidden door it betokened swing inward. He gazed out warily.

He was looking into a cell, the counterpart of the one in which he had been confined. A smoldering torch was thrust into a niche on the wall, and by its lurid and flickering light he made out a form on the floor, shackled wrist and ankle as he had been shackled. A man; at first Kane thought him to be a negro but a second glance made him doubt. The hair was too straight, the features too regular. Negroid, yes, but some alien blood in his veins had sharpened those features and given the man that high magnificent forehead, and those hard vibrant eyes which stared at Kane so intensely. The skin was dark, but not black.

The man spoke in an unfamiliar dialect, one which was strangely distinct and clear-cut in contrast to the guttural jargon of the black people with whom Kane was familiar. The Englishman spoke in English, and then in the language of the river tribes.

"You who come through the ancient door," said the other, in the latter dialect, "who are you? You are no black man—at first I thought you one of the Old Race, but now I see you are not as they. Whence come you?"

"I am Solomon Kane," said the Puritan, "a prisoner in this devil-city. I come from far across the blue salt sea."

The man's eyes lighted at the word.

"The sea! The ancient and everlasting! The sea which I never saw but which cradled the glory of my ancestors! Tell me, stranger, have you, like they, sailed across the breast of the great blue monster, and have your eyes looked on the golden spires of Atlantis and the crimson walls of Mu?"

"Truly," answered Solomon uncertainly, "I have sailed the seas, even to Hindostan and Cathay, but of the countries you mention I know nothing."

"Nay," the other sighed, "I dream —I dream. Already the shadow of the great night falls across my brain and my words wander. Stranger, there have been times when these cold walls and floor have seemed to melt into green surging deeps and my soul was filled with the deep booming of the everlasting sea. I who have never seen the sea!"

Kane shuddered involuntarily. Surely this man was insane. Suddenly the other shot out a withered claw-like hand and gripped his arm, despite the hampering chain.

"You whose skin is so strangely white! Have you seen Nakari, the she-fiend who rules this crumbling city?"

"I have seen her," said Kane grimly, "and now I flee like a hunted rat from her murderers."

"You hate her!" the other cried. "Ha, I know! You seek Mara, the white girl who is her slave?"

"Aye."

"Listen, white man," the shackled one spoke with strange solemnity; "I am dying. Nakari's rack has done its work. I die and with me dies the shadow of the glory that was my nation's. For I am the last of my race. In all the world there is none like me. Hark now, to the voice of a dying race."

And Kane leaning there in the flickering semi-darkness of the cell heard the strangest tale to which man has ever listened, brought out of the mist of the dim dawn ages by the lips of delirium. Clear and distinct the words fell from the dying man and Kane alternately burned and froze as vista after gigantic vista of time and space swept up before him.

"LONG eons ago—ages, ages ago— the empire of my race rose proudly above the waves. So long ago was it that no man remembers an ancestor who remembered it. In a great land to the west our cities rose. Our golden spires split the stars; our purple-prowed galleys broke the waves around the world, looting the sunset for its treasure and the sunrise for its wealth. Our legions swept forth to the north and to the south, to the west and the east, and none could stand before them. Our cities banded the world; we sent our colonies to all lands to subdue all savages, red, white or black, and enslave them. They toiled for us in the mines and at the galley's oars. All over the world the brown people of Atlantis reigned supreme. We were a sea-people and we delved the deeps of all the oceans. The mysteries were known to us, and the secret things of land and sea and sky. We read the stars and were wise. Sons of the sea, we exalted him above all others.

"We worshipped Valka and Hotah, Honen and Golgor. Many virgins, many strong youths, died on their altars and the smoke of the shrines blotted out the sun. Then the sea rose and shook himself. He thundered from his abyss and the thrones of the world fell before him! New lands rose from the deep and Atlantis and Mu were swallowed up by the gulf. The green sea roared through the fanes and the castles, and the sea-weed encrusted the golden spires and the topaz towers. The empire of Atlantis vanished and was forgotten, passing into the everlasting gulf

of time and oblivion. Likewise the colony cities in barbaric lands, cut off from their mother kingdom, perished. The black savages and the white savages rose and burned and destroyed until in all the world only the colony city of Negari remained as a symbol of the lost empire.

"Here my ancestors ruled as kings, and the ancestors of Nakari—the she-cat!—bent the knee of slavery to them. Years passed, stretching into centuries. The empire of Negari dwindled. Tribe after tribe rose and flung off the chains, pressing the lines back from the sea, until at last the sons of Atlantis gave way entirely and retreated into the city itself—the last stronghold of the race. Conquerors no longer, hemmed in by ferocious tribes, yet they held those tribes at bay for a thousand years. Negari was invincible from without; her walls held firm; but within evil influences were at work.

"The sons of Atlantis had brought their black slaves into the city with them. The rulers were warriors, scholars, priests, artizans; they did no menial work. For that they depended upon the slaves. There were more of these slaves than there were masters. And they increased while the brown people dwindled.

"They mixed with each other more and more as the race degenerated until at last only the priestcraft was free of the taint of black blood. Rulers sat on the throne of Negari who were nearly pure negro, and these allowed more and more wild tribesmen to enter the city in the guise of servants, mercenaries and friends.

"Then came a day when these fierce slaves revolted and slew all who bore a trace of brown blood, except the priests and their families. These they imprisoned as 'fetish people.' For a thousand years black men have ruled in Negari, their kings guided by the captive brown priests, who though prisoners, were yet the masters of kings."

Kane listened enthralled. To his imaginative mind, the tale burned and lived with strange fire from cosmic time and space.

"After all the sons of Atlantis, save the priests, were dead, there rose a great black king on the defiled throne of ancient Negari. He was a tiger and his warriors were like leopards. They called themselves Negari, ravishing even the name of their former masters, and none could stand before them. They swept the land from sea to sea, and the smoke of destruction put out the stars. The great river ran red and the black lords of Negari strode above the corpses of their black foes. Then the great king died and the black empire crumbled, even as the brown kingdom of Negari had crumbled. They were skilled in war—the dead sons of Atlantis, their masters, had trained them in the ways of battle, and against the wild tribesmen they were invincible. But only the ways of war had they learned, and the empire was torn with civil strife. Murder and intrigue stalked red-handed through the palaces and the streets, and the boundaries of the empire dwindled and dwindled. All the while black kings with red, frenzied brains sat on the throne, and behind the curtains, unseen but greatly feared, the brown priests guided the nation, holding it together, keeping it from absolute destruction.

"Prisoners in the city were we, for there was nowhere else in the world to go, but we moved like ghosts through the secret passages in the walls and under the earth, spying on intrigue and doing secret magic. We upheld the cause of the royal family—the descendants of that tiger-like king of long ago—against all plotting chiefs, and grim are the tales which these silent walls could tell. For these black people are not as other negroes. A latent insanity lurks in the brains of every one. They have tasted so deeply and

so long of slaughter and victory that they are as human leopards, for ever thirsting for blood. On their myriad wretched slaves they have sated all lusts and desires until they have become foul and terrible beasts, for ever seeking some new sensation, for ever quenching their fearful thirsts in blood.

"Like a lion have they lurked in these crags for a thousand years, to rush forth and ravage the jungle and river people, enslaving and destroying. They are still invincible from without, though their possessions have dwindled to the very walls of this city, and their former great conquests and invasions have dwindled to raids for slaves.

"But as they faded, so too faded their masters, the brown priests. One by one they died, until only I remained. In the last century they too mixed with their rulers and slaves, and now—oh, black the shame upon me!—I, the last son of Atlantis, bear in my veins the taint of negro blood. They died; I remained, doing magic and guiding the black kings, I the last brown man of Negari. Then the she-fiend, Nakari, arose."

Kane leaned forward with quickened interest. New life surged into the tale as it touched upon his own time.

"Nakari!" the name was spat as a snake hisses; "slave and the daughter of a slave! Yet she prevailed when her hour came and all the royal family died.

"And me, the last son of Atlantis, me she prisoned and chained. She feared not the silent brown priests, for she was the daughter of a Satellite—one of the lesser priests, black men who did the menial work of the brown masters—performing the lesser sacrifices, divining from the livers of fowls and serpents and keeping the holy fires for ever burning. Much she knew of us and our ways, and evil ambition burned in her.

"As a child she danced in the March of the New Moon, and as a young girl she was one of the Star-maidens. Much of the lesser mysteries was known to her, and more she learned, spying upon the secret rites of the priests who enacted hidden rituals that were old when the earth was young. For the remnants of Atlantis secretly kept alive the old worships of Valka and Hotah, Honen and Golgor, long forgotten and not to be understood by these black people whose ancestors died screaming on their altars. Alone of all the black Negari she feared us not and she not only overthrew the king and set herself on the throne, but she dominated the priests—the black Satellites and the few brown masters who were left. All these last, save me, died beneath the daggers of her assassins or on her racks. She alone of all the myriad black thousands who have lived and died between these walls guessed at the hidden passages and subterranean corridors, secrets which we of the priestcraft had guarded jealously from the people for a thousand years.

"Ha! Ha! Blind, black fools! To pass an ageless age in this city, yet never to learn of the secrets thereof! Black apes—fools! Not even the lesser black priests know of the long gray corridors, lit by phosphorescent ceilings, through which in bygone ages strange forms have glided silently. For our ancestors built Negari as they built Atlantis—on a mighty scale and with an unknown art. Not for men alone did we build, but for the gods who moved unseen among us. And deep the secrets these ancient walls hold!

"Torture could not wring these secrets from our lips, but shackled in her dungeons, we trod our hidden corridors no more. For years the dust has gathered there, untouched by human foot, while we, and finally I alone, lay chained in these foul cells. And among the temples and the dark, mysterious shrines of old, move vile black Satellites, elevated by Nakari to glories that were once mine—for I am the last Atlantean high priest.

Black be their doom, and red their ruin! Valka and Golgor, gods lost and forgotten, whose memory shall die with me, strike down their walls and humble them unto the dust! Break the altars of their blind pagan gods——"

Kane realized that the man was wandering in his mind. The keen brain had begun to crumble at last.

"Tell me," said he; "you mentioned the white girl, Mara. What do you know of her?"

"She was brought to Negari years ago by raiders," the other answered, "only a few years after the rise of the black queen, whose slave she is. Little of her I know, for shortly after her arrival, Nakari turned on me—and the years that lie between have been grim black years, shot red with torture and agony. Here I have lain, hampered by my chains from escape which lay in that door through which you entered—and for the knowledge of which Nakari has torn me on racks and suspended me over slow fires."

Kane shuddered. "You know not if they have so misused the white girl? Her eyes are haunted and she has wasted away."

"She has danced with the Star-maidens at Nakari's command, and has looked on the bloody and terrible rites of the Black Temple. She has lived for years among a people with whom blood is cheaper than water, who delight in slaughter and foul torture, and such sights as she has looked upon would blast the eyes and wither the flesh of strong men. She has seen the victims of Nakura die amid horrid torments, and the sight is burned for ever in the brain of the beholder. The rites of the Atlanteans the blacks took whereby to honor their crude gods, and though the essence of those rites is lost in the wasting years, yet even as Nakari's black apes perform them, they are not such as men can look on, unshaken."

Kane was thinking: "A fair day for the world when this Atlantis sank, for most certainly it bred a race of strange and unknown evil." Aloud he said: "Who is this Master of whom Nakari spake, and what meant she by calling Mara his bride?"

"Nakura—Nakura. The skull of evil, the symbol of Death that they worship. What know these savages of the gods of sea-girt Atlantis? What know they of the dread and unseen gods whom their masters worshipped with majestic and mysterious rites? They understand not of the unseen essence, the invisible deity that reigns in the air and the elements; they must worship a material object, endowed with human shape. Nakura was the last great wizard of Atlantean Negari. A brown renegade he was, who conspired against his own people and aided the revolt of the black beasts. In life they followed him and in death they deified him. High in the Tower of Death his fleshless skull is set, and on that skull hinge the brains of all the people of Negari. Nay, we of Atlantis worshipped Death, but we likewise worshipped Life. These people worship only Death and call themselves Sons of Death. And the skull of Nakura has been to them for a thousand years the symbol of their power, the evidence of their greatness."

"Do you mean," Kane broke in impatiently on these ramblings, "that they will sacrifice the girl to their god?"

"In the Moon of Skulls she will die on the Black Altar."

"What in God's name is this Moon of Skulls?" Kane cried passionately.

"The full moon. At the full of each moon, which we name the Moon of Skulls, a virgin dies on the Black Altar before the Tower of Death, where centuries ago, virgins died in honor of Golgor, the god of Atlantis. Now from the face of the tower that once housed the glory of Golgor, leers down the skull of the renegade wizard, and the people believe that his brain still lives therein to guide the star of the city. For look ye, stran-

ger, when the full moon gleams over the rim of the tower and the chant of the priests falls silent, then from the skull of Nakura thunders a great voice, raised in an ancient Atlantean chant, and the black people fall on their faces before it.

"But hark, there is a secret way, a stair leading up to a hidden niche behind the skull, and there a priest lurks and chants. In days gone by one of the sons of Atlantis had this office, and by all rights of men and gods it should be mine this day. For though we sons of Atlantis worshipped our ancient gods in secret, the black people would have none of them and to hold our power we were devotees to their foul gods and we sang and sacrificed to him whose memory we cursed.

"But Nakari discovered the secret, known before only to the brown priests, and now one of her black Satellites mounts the hidden stair and yammers forth the strange and terrible chant which is but meaningless gibberish to him, as to those who hear it. I, and only I, know its grim and fearful meaning."

Kane's brain whirled in his efforts to formulate some plan of action. For the first time during the whole search for the girl, he felt himself against a blank wall. This palace was a labyrinth, a maze in which he could decide no direction. The corridors seemed to run without plan or purpose, and how could he find Marylin, prisoned as she doubtless was in one of the myriad chambers or cells? Or had she already passed over the borderline of life, or succumbed to the brutal torture-lust of Nakari?

He scarcely heard the ravings and mutterings of the dying man.

"Stranger, do you indeed live or are you but one of the ghosts which have haunted me of late, stealing through the darkness of my cell? Nay, you are flesh and blood—but you are a white savage, as Nakari's race are black savages—eons ago when your ancestors were defending their caves against the tiger and the mammoth, with crude spears of flint, the gold spires of my people split the stars! They are gone and forgotten, and the world is a waste of barbarians, white and black. Let me, too, pass as a dream that is forgotten in the mists of the ages——"

Kane rose and paced the cell. His fingers closed like steel talons as on a sword hilt and a blind red wave of fury surged through his brain. Oh God! to get his foes before the keen blade that had been taken from him—to face the whole city, one man against them all——

Kane pressed his hands against his temples.

"The moon was nearly full when last I saw it. But I know not how long ago that was. I know not how long I have been in this accursed palace, or how long I lay in that dungeon where Nakari threw me. The time of full moon may be past, and—oh merciful God!—Marylin may be dead already."

"Tonight is the Moon of Skulls," muttered the other; "I heard one of my jailers speak of it."

Kane gripped the dying man's shoulder with unconscious force.

"If you hate Nakari or love mankind, in God's name tell me how to save the child."

"Love mankind?" the priest laughed insanely. "What has a son of Atlantis and a priest of forgotten Golgor to do with love? What are mortals but food for the jaws of the black gods? Softer girls than your Mara have died screaming beneath these hands and my heart was as iron to their cries. Yet hate"—the strange eyes flamed with fearful light—"for hate I will tell you what you wish to know!

"Go to the Tower of Death when the moon is risen. Slay the black priest who lurks behind the skull of Nakura, and then when the chanting of the worshippers below ceases, and the masked slayer beside the Black Altar raises the sacrificial dagger,

speak in a loud voice that the people can understand, bidding them set free the victim and offer up instead, Nakari, queen of Negari!

"As for the rest, afterward you must rely on your own craft and prowess if you come free."

Kane shook him.

"Swift! Tell me how I am to reach this tower!"

"Go back through the door whence you came." The man was sinking fast, his words dropped to whispers. "Turn to the left and go a hundred paces. Mount the stair you come to, as high as it goes. In the corridor where it ceases go straight for another hundred paces, and when you come to what seems a blank wall, feel over it until you find a projecting spring. Press this and enter the door which will open. You will then be out of the palace and in the cliffs against which it is built, and in the only one of the secret corridors known to the people of Negari. Turn to your right and go straight down the passage for five hundred paces. There you will come to a stair which leads up to the niche behind the skull. The Tower of Death is built into the cliff and projects above it. There are two stairs——"

Suddenly the voice trailed out. Kane leaned forward and shook the man but he suddenly rose up with a great effort. His eyes blazed with a wild and unearthly light and he flung his shackled arms wide.

"The sea!" he cried in a great voice. "The golden spires of Atlantis and the sun on the deep blue waters! I come!"

And as Kane reached to lay him down again, he slumped back, dead.

6. The Shattering of the Skull

"By thought a crawling ruin,
By life a leaping mire,
By a broken heart in the breast of the world,
And the end of the world's desire."
—Chesterton.

KANE wiped the cold sweat from his pale brow as he hurried down the shadowy passage. Outside this horrible palace it must be night. Even now the full moon—the grim Moon of Skulls—might be rising above the horizon. He paced off a hundred paces and came upon the stair the dying priest had mentioned. This he mounted, and coming into the corridor above, he measured off another hundred paces and brought up short against what appeared to be a doorless wall. It seemed an age before his frantic fingers found a piece of projecting metal. There was a creak of rusty hinges as the hidden door swung open and Kane looked into a passageway darker than the one in which he stood.

He entered, and when the door shut behind him he turned to his right and groped his way along for five hundred paces. There the corridor was lighter; light sifted in from without, and Kane discerned a stairway. Up this he went for several steps, then halted, baffled. At a sort of landing the stairway became two, one leading away to the left, the other to the right. Kane cursed. He felt that he could not afford to make a mistake—time was too precious—but how was he to know which would lead him to the niche where the priest hid?

The Atlantean had been about to tell him of these stairs when struck by the delirium which precedes death, and Kane wished fervently that he had lived only a few moments longer.

At any rate, he had no time to waste; right or wrong, he must chance it. He chose the right hand stair and ran swiftly up it. No time for caution now. He felt instinctively that the time of the sacrifice was close at hand. He came into another passage and discerned by the change in masonry that he was out of the cliffs again and in some building—presumably the Tower of Death. He expected any moment to come upon another stair, and suddenly his expectations were realized—but instead of up, it led down. From

somewhere in front of him Kane heard a vague, rhythmic murmur and a cold hand gripped his heart. The chanting of the worshippers before the Black Altar!

He raced forward recklessly, rounded a turn in the corridor, brought up short against a door and looked through a tiny aperture. His heart sank. He had chosen the wrong stair and had wandered into some other building adjoining the Tower of Death.

He looked upon a grim and terrible scene. In a wide open space before a great black tower whose spire rose above the crags behind it, two long lines of black dancers swayed and writhed. Their voices rose in a strange meaningless chant, and they did not move from their tracks. From their knees upward their bodies swayed in fantastic rhythmical motions, and in their hands torches tossed and whirled, shedding a lurid shifting red light over the scene. Behind them were ranged a vast concourse of people who stood silent. The dancing torchlight gleamed on a sea of glittering eyes and black faces. In front of the dancers rose the Tower of Death, gigantically tall, black and horrific. No door or window opened in its face, but high on the wall in a sort of ornamented frame there leered a grim symbol of death and decay. The skull of Nakura! A faint eery glow surrounded it, lit somehow from within the tower, Kane knew, and wondered by what strange art the priests had kept the skull from decay and dissolution so long.

But it was neither the skull nor the tower which gripped the Puritan's horrified gaze and held it. Between the converging lines of yelling, swaying worshippers there rose a great black altar. On this altar lay a slim white shape.

"Marylin!" the word burst from Kane's lips in a great sob.

For a moment he stood frozen, helpless, struck blind. No time now to retrace his steps and find the niche where the skull priest lurked. Even now a faint glow was apparent behind the spire of the tower, etching that spire blackly against the sky. The moon had risen. The chant of the dancers soared up to a frenzy of sound and from the silent watchers behind them began a sinister low rumble of drums. To Kane's dazed mind it seemed that he looked on some red debauch of a lower Hell. What ghastly worship of past eons did these perverted and degenerate rites symbolize? Kane knew that these black people aped the rituals of their former masters in their crude way, and even in his despair he found time to shudder at the thought of what those original rites must have been.

Now a fearful shape rose up beside the altar where lay the silent girl. A tall black man, entirely naked save for a hideous painted mask on his face and a great head-dress of waving plumes. The drone of the chant sank low for an instant, then rose up again to wilder heights. Was it the vibrations of their song that made the floor quiver beneath Kane's feet?

Kane with shaking fingers began to unbar the door. Naught to do now but to rush out barehanded and die beside the girl he could not save. Then his gaze was blocked by a giant form which shouldered in front of the door. A huge black man, a chief by his bearing and apparel, leaned idly against the wall as he watched the proceedings. Kane's heart gave a great leap. This was too good to be true! Thrust in the black man's girdle was the pistol he himself had carried! He knew that his weapons must have been divided among his captors. This pistol meant nothing to the chief, but he must have been taken by its strange shape and was carrying it as savages will wear useless trinkets, or perhaps he thought it a sort of war-club. At any rate, there it was. And again floor and building seemed to tremble.

Kane pulled the door silently inward and crouched in the shadows behind his victim like a great brooding

tiger. His brain worked swiftly and formulated his plan of action. There was a dagger in the girdle beside the pistol; the black man's back was turned squarely to him and he must strike from the left to reach the heart and silence him quickly. All this passed through Solomon's brain in a flash as he crouched.

The black man was not aware of his foe's presence until Kane's lean right hand shot across his shoulder and clamped on his mouth, jerking him backward. At the same instant the Puritan's left hand tore the dagger from the girdle and with one desperate plunge sank the keen blade home. The black crumpled without a sound and in an instant Kane's pistol was in its owner's hand. A second's investigation showed that it was still loaded and the flint still in place.

No one had seen the swift murder. Those few who stood near the doorway were all facing the Black Altar, enwrapped in the drama which was there unfolding. As Kane stepped across the corpse, the chanting of the dancers ceased abruptly. In the instant of silence which followed, Kane heard, above the pounding of his own pulse, the nightwind rustle the deathlike plumes of the masked horror beside the altar. A rim of the moon glowed above the spire.

Then from high up on the face of the Tower of Death a deep voice boomed out in a strange chant. Mayhap the black priest who spoke behind the skull knew not what his words meant, but Kane believed that he at least mimicked the very intonation of those long-dead brown acolytes. Deep, mystic, resonant the voice sounded out, like the endless flowing of long tides on the broad white beaches.

The masked one beside the altar drew himself up to his great height and raised a long glimmering blade. Kane recognized his own sword, even as he leveled his pistol and fired—not at the masked priest but full at the skull which gleamed in the face of the tower! For in one blinding flash of intuition he remembered the dying Atlantean's words: "Their brains hinge on the skull of Nakura!"

Simultaneously with the crack of the pistol came a shattering crash; the dry skull flew into a thousand pieces and vanished, and behind it the chant broke off short in a death shriek. The rapier fell from the hand of the masked priest and many of the dancers crumpled to the earth, the others halting short, spellbound. Through the deathly silence which reigned for an instant, Kane rushed toward the altar; then all Hell broke loose.

A babel of bestial screams rose to the shuddering stars. For centuries only their faith in the dead Nakura had held together the blood-drenched brains of the black Negari. Now their symbol had vanished, had been blasted into nothing before their eyes. It was to them as if the skies had split, the moon fallen and the world ended. All the red visions which lurked at the backs of their corroded brains leaped into fearful life, all the latent insanity which was their heritage rose to claim its own, and Kane looked upon a whole nation turned to bellowing maniacs.

Screaming and roaring they turned on each other, men and women, tearing with frenzied finger nails, stabbing with spears and daggers, beating each other with the flaming torches, while over all rose the roar of frantic human beasts. With clubbed pistol Kane battered his way through the surging, writhing ocean of flesh, to the foot of the altar stairs. Nails raked him, knives slashed at him, torches scorched his garments but he paid no heed.

Then as he reached the altar, a terrible figure broke from the struggling mass and charged him. Nakari, queen of Negari, crazed as any of her subjects, rushed upon the white man with dagger bared and eyes horribly aflame.

"You shall not escape this time, white man!" she was screaming, but before she reached him a great black giant, dripping blood and blind from a gash across his eyes, reeled across

her path and lurched into her. She screamed like a wounded cat and struck her dagger into him, and then the groping hands closed on her. The blind giant whirled her on high with one dying effort, and her last scream knifed the din of battle as Nakari, last queen of Negari, crashed against the stones of the altar and fell shattered and dead at Kane's feet.

KANE sprang up the black steps, worn deep by the feet of myriad priests and victims, and as he came, the masked figure, who had stood like one turned to stone, came suddenly to life. He bent swiftly, caught up the sword he had dropped and thrust savagely at the charging white man. But the dynamic quickness of Solomon Kane was such as few men could match. A twist and sway of his steely body and he was inside the thrust, and as the blade slid harmlessly between arm and chest, he brought down the heavy pistol barrel among the waving plumes, crashing headdress, mask and skull with one blow.

Then ere he turned to the fainting girl who lay bound on the altar, he flung aside the shattered pistol and snatched his stolen sword from the nerveless hand which still grasped it, feeling a fierce thrill of renewed confidence at the familiar feel of the hilt.

Marylin lay white and silent, her death-like face turned blindly to the light of the moon which shone calmly down on the frenzied scene. At first Kane thought her to be dead, but his searching fingers detected a faint flutter of pulse. He cut her bonds and lifted her tenderly—only to drop her again and whirl as a hideous blood-stained figure of insanity came leaping and gibbering up the steps. Full upon Kane's out-thrust blade the creature ran, and toppled back into the red swirl below, clawing beast-like at its mortal wound.

Then beneath Kane's feet the altar rocked; a sudden tremor hurled him to his knees and his horrified eyes beheld the Tower of Death sway to and fro. Some horror of Nature was taking place and this fact pierced the crumbling brains of the fiends who fought and screamed below. A new element entered into their shrieking, and then the Tower of Death swayed far out with a terrible and awesome majesty—broke from the rocking crags and gave way with a thunder of crashing worlds. Great stones and shards of masonry came raining down, bringing death and destruction to hundreds of screaming humans below. One of these stones crashed to pieces on the altar beside Kane, showering him with dust.

"Earthquake!" he gasped, and smitten by this new terror he caught up the senseless girl and plunged recklessly down the cracking steps, hacking and stabbing a way through the crimson whirlpools of bestial humanity that still tore and ravened.

The rest was a red nightmare, in which Kane's dazed brain refused to record all its horrors. It seemed that for screaming crimson centuries he reeled through narrow winding streets where bellowing, screeching black demons battled and died, among titanic walls and black columns that rocked against the sky and crashed to ruin about him, while the earth heaved and trembled beneath his staggering feet and the thunder of crashing towers filled the world.

Gibbering fiends in human shape clutched and clawed at him, to fade before his flailing sword, and falling stones bruised and battered him. He crouched as he reeled along, covering the girl with his body as best he could, sheltering her alike from blind stone and blinder human. And at last, when it seemed mortal endurance had reached its limit, he saw the great black outer wall of the city loom before him, rent from earth to parapet and tottering for its fall. He dashed through a crevice, and gathering his efforts, made one last sprint. And scarce was he out of reach than

the wall crashed, falling inward like a great black wave.

The night wind was in his face and behind him rose the clamor of the doomed city as Kane staggered down the hill path that trembled beneath his feet.

7. *The Faith of Solomon*

"The last lost giant, even God,
Is risen against the world."
—Chesterton.

DAWN lay like a cool white hand on the brow of Solomon Kane. The nightmares faded from his soul as he breathed deep of the morning wind which blew up from the jungle far below his feet—a wind laden with the musk of decaying vegetation; yet it was like the breath of life to him, for the scents were those of the clean natural disintegration of outdoor things, not the loathsome aura of decadent antiquity that lurks in the walls of eon-old cities—Kane shuddered involuntarily.

He bent over the sleeping girl who lay at his feet, arranged as comfortably as possible with the few soft tree branches he had been able to find for her bed. Now she opened her eyes and stared about wildly for an instant; then as her gaze met the face of Solomon, lighted by one of his rare smiles, she gave a little sob of thankfulness and clung to him.

"Oh, Captain Kane! Have we in truth escaped from yon fearful city? Now it seems all like a dream—after you fell through the secret door in my chamber Nakari later went to your dungeon—as she told me—and returned in vile humor. She said you were a fool, for she had offered you the kingdom of the world and you had but insulted her. She screamed and raved and cursed like one insane and swore that she would yet, alone, build a great empire of Negari. Then she turned on me and reviled me, saying that you held me—a slave—in more esteem than a queen and all her glory. And in spite of my pleas she took me across her knees and whipped me until I swooned.

"Afterward I lay half senseless for a long time, and was only dimly aware that men came to Nakari and said that you had escaped; they said you were a sorcerer, for you faded through a solid wall like a ghost. But Nakari killed the men who had brought you from the cell, and for hours she was like a wild beast.

"How long I lay thus I know not. In those terrible rooms and corridors where no natural sunlight ever entered, one lost all track of time. But from the time you were captured by Nakari and the time that I was placed on the altar, at least a day and a night and another day must have passed. It was only a few hour before the sacrifice that word came you had escaped.

"Nakari and her Star-maidens came to prepare me for the rite." At the bare memory of that fearful ordeal she whimpered and hid her face in her hands. "I must have been drugged—I only know that they clothed me in the white robe of the sacrifice and carried me into a great black chamber filled with horrid statues. There I lay for a space like one in a trance while the women performed various strange and shameful rites according to their grim religion. Then I fell into a swoon, and when I emerged I was lying bound on the Black Altar—the torches were tossing, and the devotees chanting—behind the Tower of Death the rising moon was beginning to glow—all this I knew faintly, as in a deep dream. And as in a dream I saw the glowing skull high on the tower—and the gaunt black naked priest holding a sword above my heart; then I knew no more. What happened?"

"At about that moment," Kane answered, "I emerged from a building wherein I had wandered by mistake, and blasted their hellish skull to atoms with a pistol ball. Whereupon, all these people, being cursed from birth

by demons, and being likewise possessed of devils, fall to slaying one another, and in the midst of the tumult an earthquake cometh to pass which shakes the walls down. Then I snatch you up, and running at random, come upon a rent in the outer wall and thereby escape, carrying you, who seem in a swoon.

"Once only you awoke, after I had crossed the Bridge-Across-the-Sky, as the black people called it, which was crumbling beneath our feet by reason of the earthquake. After I had come to these cliffs, but dared not descend them in the darkness, the moon being nigh to setting by that time, you awoke and screamed and clung to me, whereupon I soothed you as best I might, and after a time you fell into a natural sleep."

"And now what?" asked the girl.

"England!" Kane's deep eyes lighted at the word. "I find it hard to remain in the land of my birth for more than a month at a time; yet though I am cursed with the wanderlust, 'tis a name which ever rouses a glow in my bosom. And how of you, child?"

"Oh heaven!" she cried, clasping her small hands. "Home! Something of which to be dreamed—never attained, I fear. Oh Captain Kane, how shall we gain through all the vast leagues of jungle which lie between this place and the coast?"

"Marylin," said Kane gently, stroking her curly hair, "methinks you lack somewhat in faith, both in Providence and in me. Nay, alone I am a weak creature, having no strength or might in me; yet in times past hath God made me a great vessel of wrath and a sword of deliverance. And, I trust, shall do so again.

"Look you, little Marylin: in the last few hours as it were, we have seen the passing of an evil race and the fall of a foul black empire. Men died by thousands about us, and the earth rose beneath our feet, hurling down towers that broke the heavens; yea, death fell about us in a red rain, yet we escaped unscathed.

"Therein is more than the hand of man! Nay, a Power—the mightiest Power! That which guided me across the world, straight to that demon city—which led me to your chamber—which aided me to escape again and led me to the one man in all the city who would give the information I must have, the strange, evil priest of an elder race who lay dying in a subterranean cell—and which guided me to the outer wall, as I ran blindly and at random—for should I have come under the cliffs which formed the rest of the wall, we had surely perished. That same Power brought us safely out of the dying city, and safe across the rocking bridge—which shattered and thundered down into the chasm just as my feet touched solid earth!

"Think you that having led me this far, and accomplished such wonders, the Power will strike us down now? Nay! Evil flourishes and rules in the cities of men and the waste places of the world, but anon the great giant that is God rises and smites for the righteous, and they lay faith on him.

"I say this: this cliff shall we descend in safety, and yon dank jungle traverse in safety, and it is as sure that in old Devon your people shall clasp you again to their bosom, as that you stand here."

And now for the first time Marylin smiled, with the quick eagerness of a normal young girl, and Kane sighed in relief. Already the ghosts were fading from her haunted eyes, and Kane looked to the day when her horrible experiences should be as a dimming dream. One glance he flung behind him, where beyond the scowling hills the lost city of Negari lay shattered and silent, amid the ruins of her own walls and the fallen crags which had kept her invincible so long, but which had at last betrayed her to her doom. A momentary pang smote him as he

thought of the myriad of crushed, still forms lying amid those ruins; then the blasting memory of their evil crimes surged over him and his eyes hardened.

"And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare; for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.

"For Thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defended city a ruin; a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built.

"Moreover, the multitude of Thy strangers shall be like small dust and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth suddenly away; yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly.

"Stay yourselves and wonder; cry ye out and cry; they are drunken but not with wine; they stagger but not with strong drink.

"Verily, Marylin," said Kane with a sigh, "with mine own eyes have I seen the prophecies of Isaiah come to pass. They were drunken but not with wine! Nay, blood was their drink and in that red flood they dipped deep and terribly."

Then taking the girl by the hand he started toward the edge of the cliff. At this very point had he ascended, in the night—how long ago it seemed.

Kane's clothing hung in tatters about him. He was torn, scratched and bruised. But in his eyes shone the clear calm light of serenity as the sun came up, flooding cliffs and jungle with a golden light that was like a promise of joy and happiness.

[THE END]

An Outré Story Is This

The Ruling Passion

By C. HENRY

IN HIS dim bedroom, just beyond the darkened study which had been the scene of his forty years' rule over Norcross School, the Headmaster lay dying. There could be no manner of doubt of that, with double lobar pneumonia, at his age, with his weakened heart. It was a matter of days at most.

The sound of his labored breathing was horrible, but there was none to hear. In an easy chair not far from his bed, with her nightlight shaded from his face, the nurse was asleep, her book fallen from her fingers to the floor. She had been on duty all day, and, at the last moment, the night nurse was unable to come, so she had remained at her post with a devotion to duty which, however, had proved powerless to uphold her weary eyelids. Besides, the crisis was not expected for twenty-four hours at least.

It had come, though, suddenly, terribly, just before midnight. The emaciated, big-boned body was distorted with fearful gaspings, burning with frightful heat, yet the keen mind was curiously alert, sensing the sleeping nurse, willing her imperiously to arise and come to him; but

there was no breath for words, and the nurse slept on.

Faster and shorter the laboring gasps; the driven heart beat thunderously in his ears. It was the dreaded crisis, he knew that, but he would not die . . . he would not. He would live and show them all that he was still the ruling power at Norcross School.

Ah, his will had won . . . it had won this victory as it had won so many more. The laboring heart no longer throbbed against his eardrums; the terrible struggle for each scant breath was over. He rejoiced at the relief, feeling cool and comfortable, almost well again, almost himself. It was a miracle. So this was the crisis for which doctors and nurses had been waiting for so many days! It was over and passed, and he was the victor!

Now that he need no longer concentrate upon the drawing of each dreadful breath, his relaxed mind reverted easily and naturally to the ruling passion of his life, which was, indeed, the passion for rule, for the power and authority which was the prerogative of his position as Headmaster of a great School. Nowhere else in the world today is there such absolute autocracy as that of the Headmaster of a great English school. Perhaps the nearest approach to it is that of a Superior Judge, but even the great power of such a one is hedged about by laws and watched keenly by envious lesser eyes. The rule of the Headmaster is supreme, and within all reasonable limits, his will is the law of his School. So, for forty years, it had been at Norcross. So, now that Richard was himself again, he vowed that it should be once more.

He knew how it would be when he arose from this sickbed to take again into his strong fingers the reins of rule—discipline would all be broken down, all to build up again. There was not a man among his undermasters who had the force to sustain it in his absence. He knew them all, knew them thoroughly and mercilessly as weaklings. Even Gregory, his second in command, was a weakling compared with himself—and Gregory must have been holding the reins all these long weeks while he fought with death for his breath . . . until the fight was won. Now, or at most in a few days, he would take over again, and things would go on as they were before. The boys would know that there was a strong hand and a keen mind over them again, and the School would be again a model of discipline and order, of silence and of well-done work.

Silence . . . there was need of that. For the last few minutes, even while his mind was busy with its thoughts, he had been increasingly conscious of a growing disturbance in the room over his head. What was that room? Ah, of course, it was a dormitory-study; one of those marvelously modern suites which had made Norcross famous throughout the scholastic world; two bedrooms opening upon a central study, with a bathroom at the rear. And who would be occupying that particular suite now? His mind gave him the answer at once, and he rejoiced at its renewed keenness: Armstrong and Bowman, boys of the Lower Fifth; he had ordered them there himself, after they had been caught making midnight disturbances in their old study for the third time. Pillow-fights—that's what it had been, so childish at fifteen; and unless his ears betrayed him, that was what was going on now, over his own head. Did the boys think him dead, that they dared? And how dared they, if they thought him dead? His anger was kindled at the implication that his forty years of fear-compelling power could have been blown out so soon and so completely. Gregory must be a

weakling indeed, if this sort of thing could take place at such a time, and it was indeed well that he, the true Head, was himself again, able to cope with such situations.

But was he really well? Could he be well so quickly? Surely there must be days, perhaps weeks, of convalescence before he would be able to leave his bed and assume the scepter of his rule. He pictured it, that supple scepter of birchen twigs, and knew that it would be awaiting him in the little compartment below the north window of his study when he was strong enough to wield it once again. When would he be strong? There was need for such strength of will and of arm this very night, to bring those unspeakably thoughtless boys above to their senses. He strained his ears, and the noises of scuffling seemed louder. Almost he caught the sound of smothered laughter—yet was not that absurd, when one considered the solid masonry of the place? Still, the noises were not imaginary, and they were growing less restrained. Something should be done about it . . . something *must* be done about it.

He lifted himself on his elbow, and found the movement surprizingly easy. Why, he really was quite well and strong again, and all his fever and soreness had left him. So this was the way the crisis came and passed in lobar pneumonia? How strange, and yet how fortunate! He raised himself still farther. He swept aside the bedclothes, and swung his feet to the floor. Tentatively he tried to rise, expecting his limbs to fail beneath him, but they did not fail. He stood erect.

The nurse slept on, and he did not disturb her slumbers as he drew on his wadded dressing-robe and fumbled his feet into his padded slippers. Nor did she stir as he passed her on the way to the study.

2

Boys of fifteen years find it hard, almost impossible, to realize the threat or the meaning of death, and Armstrong and Bowman both were fifteen years of age. For weeks they had been held in awe by the atmosphere of gloom which enshrouded the School; all their natural animal spirits had been cowed and controlled, day after day, day after day. They said that the old Head was dying, but surely that could not be true. What, that old man of steel and granite dying? The boys could not imagine it, and yet "they" said it was true . . . for weeks they had been waiting for what they called the crisis, and they said that he had less than one chance in a hundred of surviving it, whatever it was, when it came. The boys felt that he would survive it. They could not conceive of that iron will failing to meet and master any situation which might confront it.

Meanwhile this matter of living like mice was becoming increasingly insupportable. Flesh and blood—boy-flesh and boy-blood—could not stand it any longer. They must do something to "blow off steam" or they would explode.

As if by mutual consent, creeping from their couches, each with a pillow firmly grasped in the right hand, they had met on the mutual ground of the central study; and now the feathers were flying. Circling about each other, panting for breath, gurgling with laughter, all thoughts of quiet, of the near presence of death in the School, were swept quite out of their minds. The Head himself, with all that he stood for, was forgotten.

So absorbed were they in their duel that they did not hear the latch click upon the outer door; they did not see the door open; nor did they note the amazing intrusion until the

Head himself — he whom they thought safely upon his sickbed— was between them, the dreaded symbol of his authority firmly clasped in his right hand! Then, with mutual gasps of the old fear, but without thought of any new terror, they let the pillows fall from their hands, and stood still.

The Head regarded them grimly and silently, as was his wont, for some seconds before he spoke. "Well, boys," he said at last with fear-compelling pleasantry, "so you are amusing yourselves with a pillow-fight, eh? But aren't you a little old for such a childish pastime?"

Neither of the boys spoke. They knew that no answer was expected of them.

The Head's voice took on a sharper note: "Besides, did I not warn you last time you were reported to me for causing a similar disturbance, that there must be no repetition of this offense? Yet you choose a time when I am supposed to be powerless, perhaps upon my deathbed, to perpetrate your antics above my very head. It was rash of you, very, and I think that you will regret it."

Regret it they did, more desperately every moment, as each in turn was made to bend across the broad arm of a chair and present his unprotected person to the biting embrace of the birch. Four strokes from left to right; four more from right to left . . . who was it that had said the Old Man was on his deathbed? Both boys had been birched before, but never before had either of them felt the strength of the Head's arm so keenly as now. Neither cried out—they were proud of that—but both boys were trembling as they drew up their pajamas and meekly obeyed the gesture which swept them back into their bedrooms. Nor did they venture out again, even to compare notes, after the door had clicked crisply shut after the terrible Head.

3

MORNING, and the bell for morning prayers.

Gregory conducted them, as he had done for so many weeks; but there was a new note in his voice this morning. All the boys sensed it, Armstrong and Bowman most of all. There was news in the air. It would come as soon as the benediction had been pronounced . . . and it did.

"There will be no classes today. You will disperse to your studies quietly and at once. The Headmaster of Norcross is—dead. He passed away at midnight."

4

BACK in their rooms, the two boys faced each other breathlessly across the very chair which had sustained their sufferings of the previous night.

"Did you hear what he said, Art?" demanded Bowman. "He said *midnight*, and—and your clock, that confounded chiming clock of yours, chimed *a quarter past* just as we went back to our rooms last night. I'll swear to it!"

"You must be dreaming!" retorted Armstrong between tight lips: "I mean, you must have been dreaming . . . perhaps we both were!"

The same impulse came to both at once, and each turned sharply aside to his own bedroom, where the tumbled bedclothes still lay as they had been left.

After a second or so, they returned slowly to the common room with faces drawn and white. Bowman looked a question at his roommate, who nodded affirmatively. "Yes," he said, although his lips trembled so that he could scarcely be heard, "yes, there is quite a bit of blood upon the under sheet!"

"On mine, too!" answered the other.

A Five-Minute Story

The Man Who Walked Upon the Air

By CHARLES HILAN CRAIG

WHEN Travis had been a boy he had one night seen the Great Kellar cause a beautiful girl to float in space without the least sign of a support of any kind. He had gone home talking only of that particular illusion. The other tricks were forgotten—the comedy—the beauty—the mystery. He could think of nothing but that lady sleeping upon thin air.

"How did she do it?" he had asked his father.

"It's a trick," was the answer.

"But how'd she float?"

His father had been busy with the evening paper. "Aw—will-power, I suppose."

The boy had had a vague idea of will-power, but this was the first time it had been associated with such as that.

He had gone to bed to dream vague, tantalizing dreams, dreams of himself walking upon the air.

As the years flew Travis did not forget. The thought of his desire became a passion with him—to conquer the air became a life-work.

And that is why Travis turned to aviation, that he might the better study the air and its elements. And he did master aircraft; first in theory, later in practise. Of a temperament utterly devoid of fear, it soon was said of him that he was the world's most daring flyer. New devices for safer flying were his gift to the world—a new parachute, or rather many of them. He mastered the machines of the air.

But ever deep down within him there was that other idea which never had been forgotten—that some day, somehow, he would learn to walk upon the air. Man had mastered it with aircraft—now why could not man master it in another way? The thought became the very life, the religion of Travis. He talked of it to others, but they smiled and thought him a little "off."

At the time of one particular flight Travis was trying out a new parachute, made according to a new idea. It was a queer little piece of material, barely half the size of the usual one. He was flying at a state fair. His gymnastics in the air had been the marvel of the audience till the left wing of his plane crumpled. Travis was not greatly disturbed. The thought came to him as he climbed swiftly over the side that this had proved an expensive exhibition for him. A moment he poised as the plane dropped, glimpsed the rolling earth seven thousand feet below, and lunged into space.

Travis held a clear mind as he started downward, waited till he had dropped far, then grasped the ring at his left shoulder and pulled. He

felt the swish of cloth as the parachute trailed out, set himself for the jerk.

It occurred to Travis all at once that the parachute was not going to open, that he was hurtling through space, hauling behind and above him a long strip of useless cloth and cord.

When he had dropped two thousand feet Travis began to realize that he was doomed, that he was to die before he had learned to walk upon the air. A swift, instinctive terror came to him that tore through every nerve in his body, chilling him. Nor was he so much afraid of actual death as of the fact that he must die before he had learned.

There came to him as upon a silver screen the picture of the Great Kellar and his floating lady; of his father and the suggestion that it was "will-power."

Travis thought hard in the next thousand feet of his fall to the earth.

"I can try," he said to himself.

And he immediately set himself to will that his drop should go no farther. With all his power he willed that his speed slow up—cease. His senses reeled as the wind whistled past his body, but he kept firm to his resolve. He felt a moment of blackness, a jar of some sort, and then it was he realized that his speed was diminishing. He was actually slowing down in the air. Stronger than ever became the energy with which he willed that he should conquer the air. He was slowing, slowing, and all at once the dead parachute broke loose and left him.

He said suddenly: "Stop!" And the abruptness with which he stopped in midair a thousand feet above the grandstand shook him. For a full minute he hung there in the air watching the scene below him, the countless thousands of people, the color, the beauty, the life of it.

Then at last, happy in the thought of his victory over the air after all these years, Travis willed that he should approach the earth. Immediately he started dropping, slowly. It occurred to him that these people below were having a real run for their money this day. His courage returning, he thought of experimenting further on his discovery.

He willed that he rise in the air, and rise he did. Then presently he decided to mystify those below by floating away out of sight. This he did, coming lightly to earth on the outskirts of the town.

Highly elated, Travis started back toward his hotel, deciding to walk the three miles, the better to think over what he had found.

It was on this walk that the full meaning of what he had done came to Travis. His was undoubtedly the most epochal discovery in the history of the world, if he could teach others. Why, anything was possible now!

He arrived presently at his hotel and sat there in the lobby for a long time thinking, thinking. His blood racing through his veins, Travis sat thinking. The master of the world if he wished to be!

A man came from the news stand with an evening paper, started to read and then laid it aside as he was paged. Travis glanced at the paper and saw his photograph staring out. Interested, he walked over and picked up that paper. Soon they would be speaking of him in screaming eight-column heads, he thought. He sat down and read the account which had been written about him.

Travis read. All at once he chuckled. Then he doubled up with a ghastly, sardonic, *silent* burst of laughter. Then he ceased laughing and looked a little worried—fear came to him. And then for the first time it occurred to Travis that he was dead.

DEAD MAN'S FINGERS

by Harold Simpson

"Her eyes were fixed on him as he came nearer and nearer."

THE car went racing through the night. Rain lashed the windscreen as with the sound of shingles hurled by a mighty hand. Ahead the road gleamed in a yellow streak; on each side the trees, bending to the gale, swayed threateningly.

Jack Clavering sat motionless at the wheel, staring steadily in front of him. The girl beside him glanced at his profile every now and then, but he neither turned his head nor spoke. She could have screamed from the sheer tension of it.

Thoughts were whirling through her brain. They were one with the wildness of the night. All around was blackness. Only the yellow gleam ahead. It was leading them—where?

Blackness. Hopeless, impenetrable blackness. There was no way out. That yellow gleam was a mockery, a delusion. Soon it would disappear, and darkness would envelop them entirely.

She saw that pale upturned face, staring with sightless eyes at the ceiling. They were mocking her, those eyes. "There is no escape!" they were saying. "There can be no escape. You were mine in life, you are mine still; wherever you go, I shall follow you." A derisive laugh rang in her ears. The wind took it up and tossed

it about, hither and thither, until it seemed to echo all around her. She shuddered. All at once she clutched at Jack's arm, causing the car to swerve. Jack righted it with some difficulty. He shouted at her.

"Sybil! For God's sake mind what you're doing!"

"Jack! I can't go on! I can't!"

He turned his head ever so slightly.

"Are you mad? We can't turn back now!"

"Then let's stop somewhere—anywhere—for ten minutes—I can't bear it—this awful noise—the darkness——" She shuddered again.

Jack was silent for a moment.

"Very well," he answered curtly. "But we're damned fools; it's only adding to the danger."

"I must stop, Jack—I must."

Dimly through the darkness she saw him nod a grudging assent. Then he concentrated on the road once more. The thoughts in Sybil Morton's brain began to whirl again, maddeningly, unceasingly. That pale upturned face, with its eyes staring at the ceiling! Her husband. For years the name had meant nothing to her but mere possession. Possession. That was it. He had possessed her body and starved her soul. But she was his wife. Alive or dead, he was not the sort of man to forget that. Of pity she felt none—only fear. She had decided, after desperate months of indecision, to leave him. At the very moment of her anticipated freedom he had blundered in upon them. The mere recollection of it made her shiver. Those few bitter, insulting, horrible words he had hurled at her, words which had driven Jack to fury. The brief struggle; the fall with his head against the curb fender. And then that pale upturned face; those sightless, seeing eyes.

A pinhole of light shone out suddenly on the left ahead of them. She clutched Jack's arm again, but more gently.

"Jack, we're coming to a village."

"All right!"

The pinhole grew larger, gradually revealing itself as the light from the window of what looked like a little country inn. The car began to slow down.

THE landlord of "The Truss of Hay" was just about to put up his shutters for the night, when, above the noise of the wind and rain, he heard the sound of a car. He listened, then called to his wife, who was half-way up the stairs with a bedroom candle in her hand.

"Sounds like a car stopping, Mother."

"Well, I'm not making up no beds tonight," she called back. "They must go elsewhere." She resumed her passage up the stairs, and entered the bedroom and banged the door to with a vigor that left no doubt as to her determination in the matter.

The landlord continued listening, shutter in hand. Yes; the car had stopped outside the door. He put down the shutter, went to the door and opened it. Sybil entered, closely followed by Jack. The landlord shut the door, then remembering his wife's pronouncement, began to stammer out his apologies. Jack cut him short.

"That's all right, landlord. We shan't be here more than a few minutes. We only want a hot drink of some kind to warm us."

"It's after closing-time, sir," the landlord answered. But there was a twinkle in his eye. "The law says we mustn't serve drinks after ten o'clock."

"Yes, but surely——" Jack began.

"Don't you worry, sir," the landlord interrupted. "I'll get you something, sure enough. We don't take much heed of the law in these lonely parts.

Sybil shivered again.

"I don't want anything, thank you," she put in hurriedly.

Jack looked at her.

"I insist!" he said quietly. He turned to the landlord. "Two steaming hot whiskies—and as quick as you can." He handed him a ten-shilling note. "Here's the money and you can keep the change."

"Oh, thank you, sir. You shall have them, sir, in less than no time, sir."

As the old man began to shuffle off a gust of wind shook the house and the outside door flew open. Sybil uttered a cry of fear.

"Don't you worry, marm," the landlord said soothingly. "That door's fair crazy. Ever since the bolt's been broken it opens itself how and when it pleases." He moved up to the door, chuckling as he went. "Folks do say as it shows as I keep open house. Well, well, they bain't far wrong." He closed the door with a bang. "So now and then I locks it when the fancy takes me." He turned the key in the lock as he spoke. "There! That'll keep it quiet for a while." Shaking his head and chuckling he disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

As soon as he had gone, Jack turned to Sybil.

"Come and sit down." He led her, unresisting, to an old-fashioned horsehair sofa. "That's better. You'll soon feel all right. Let me undo your coat."

He leant down and unbuttoned her leather motor-coat. Then he stood up, took off his own coat, and threw it over a chair. Sybil sat gazing vacantly in front of her, swaying her body to and fro and moaning a little. Jack turned on her sharply.

"Sybil! Don't look like that! Try to pull yourself together! Everything depends on it."

She made no reply, but continued slightly swaying and moaning.

Jack went on, speaking in a low, intense tone. "It's horrible, I know. I'd give my soul for it not to have happened. But the horror is there, and we have got to face it."

She suddenly gave a little cry and covered her eyes with her hands. "Jack! Jack—I—I can't go on!"

He came and sat beside her on the sofa.

"Now, Sybil, listen to me. We *must* go on—it's our only hope. It would be fatal to turn back now. Look at me, Sybil!" He tried to draw her hands away, but she resisted him. Jack controlled himself with an effort; his voice became gentle and persuasive. "You must listen to me, little woman. Don't you see that if we went back now we should simply be admitting that we were guilty?"

She uncovered her face and looked up, straight in front of her.

"We are guilty!"

"Yes" he said, in the same gentle tone, "but not of murder. You know that I never meant to kill him, that I *didn't* kill him. He fell in the struggle and struck his head against the fender. It was—an accident."

She looked at him now.

"No, Jack, you never meant to kill him. But we are his murderers, all the same—you and I."

"Nonsense, Sybil!" He began to lose patience a little. "You are taking a distorted view of things. For years he has treated you worse than he would a dog. We made up our minds to run away; I wanted to give you a little happiness—God knows you have earned it! He came home—a day too soon. You remember what he called you! He lifted a chair to strike you; I wrested it from him. Then he leapt at me like a wild beast. In self-defense I clutched him by the throat. He slipped and fell backward. That's all."

She did not reply. The vision came to her of Jack's fingers clutching at her husband's throat. Was it an accident? She shuddered. Jack interpreted her silence as a sign that she was yielding. He continued in the same low, persuasive tone, but speak-

ing more rapidly, as though with greater confidence.

"No one knows that we were in the house. You were supposed to be away and the servants are all on holiday. It will be so easy to make our story good. We had decided to go away together; you left your husband a note, telling him so. That note we dated two days ago. He returned home unexpectedly, saw the note, read it, and the shock brought on a seizure. The note will be found crumpled in his hand when the caretaker comes in the morning. "I—I saw to that."

Sybil shuddered violently. "It's all so—ghastly."

"I know it's ghastly," he said. "Do you think I don't feel that as much as you you do? Do you imagine that I don't realize the beastly cold-bloodedness of all this planning and scheming? But your husband is dead—nothing can help him now—and we are innocent of his death. Surely we have the right to fight for our lives in the only way possible! No one will believe us if we don't."

He paused, and for a moment she still made no reply. Then suddenly she gave a despairing cry.

"It's no use, Jack! I can't go on!"

His face changed, and with it his confident tone. He realized that so far his pleading had been in vain.

"What do you suggest then?"

"We must go back," she moaned.

A feeling of hopelessness came over him. Was it any use trying to argue with her? But the situation was desperate. He tried to suppress any sign of irritation when he spoke again.

"Of course we shall go back, Sybil—but not now. We shall be doing neither him nor ourselves any good if we do. You know very well what would happen. I should be accused of his murder. What chance should I stand with a jury? 'The old story,' I can hear them saying to one another. 'The husband, the lover and the guilty wife.' Not that I care much what happens to me now—except for you."

His tone took on a sudden tenderness. There could be no doubt of one thing—he loved this woman with a true devotion. The web was closing round them. In trying to break through it he was thinking not of himself but of her. He was sincere in that.

This time she did not speak, and her silence gave him encouragement.

"We shall be sent for, of course. We shall be judged guilty of the one thing, but not of that greater horror. It will be thought that we were far away when the—when it happened. Naturally we can't hope to escape censure. But we shall be free—free to go away and live our lives—and perhaps in time to find—happiness!"

"Happiness!" Her voice rang out brokenly. "There can be no happiness for us, Jack."

He still kept control over himself.

"There may be," he answered gently. "We must put the past behind us, so far as we can. God knows, it is difficult! But we must, Sybil, we must. Somehow or other we must try to forget."

She sprang to her feet.

"Forget! You ask me to forget! I can see him now—lying there with his white face turned up to the ceiling, and the look—oh, the terrible look in his eyes! It will haunt me till I die!"

She put her hands over her eyes once more and broke into low sobs. Jack rose and put his arms around her.

"Sybil, don't! Don't upset yourself like this! If you wish it we'll go back. I'll face the music if you want me to. They *may* believe I am innocent."

"No, no!" she cried, uncovering her eyes. "I can't let you suffer for me. *I* will go back—no one will know you were there this afternoon—or that we were going to run away together. Your name need never come into it at all." She clutched him eagerly. "Yes, Jack, that's it! You shall take

me back to town—then you can leave me—I shall go home and find——" She broke off with another shudder, then continued bravely. "I shall ring up the police, tell them what—what I've discovered, and then——"

"You forget," he interrupted her. She looked at him questioningly. "You forget the note—crumpled in his hand. There is just the chance that they may have discovered him already."

She sank on to the sofa again with a low moan. "God! Is there no escape?"

"Only one," Jack answered. "It may not be an escape, but at least it is a loophole. We must go on."

"We ought never to have come away, Jack," she said brokenly.

"No," he agreed. "But we did come away—in the sudden shock we lost our heads—and now we must go on."

She began to moan again.

"And if we do, Jack, what will be the use? He will follow us."

"He is dead," said Jack. "How can he follow us?"

"He will follow us," she went on, unheeding, and speaking in a low, unnatural voice; "I know he will. I can see him walking in at that door, with his sneering smile—he will lay his cold hand on mine——"

She gave a shriek as a sudden low rap was heard on the outer door. At the same moment the landlord entered from the kitchen, beaming his apologies from behind two steaming glasses.

"I'm sorry to have been so long, sir, but the old woman had——"

He stopped as another low rap was heard on the door.

"Someone at the door, landlord," said Jack, trying to speak naturally.

The landlord smiled knowingly.

"It's the law," he said, putting the two glasses down on the table. "I said we didn't take much heed of the law in these parts, but the law likes its little drop of drink for all that."

He moved up to the door as he spoke, and opened it. The village constable appeared on the threshold. He took a step into the room, then stopped as he saw the strangers.

"Didn't know you had company," he said to the landlord.

"That needn't worry you, Mr. Wills," the latter answered. He indicated the steaming glasses on the table. "We're all fellow-sinners together tonight. Come in."

As THE constable advanced into the room, the landlord closed the door, but did not lock it.

"Good evening, mum. Good evening, sir," said Police Constable Wills rather shamefacedly. Then he addressed Jack more particularly. "Beg your pardon, sir. I saw the car, but I thought it belonged to one of the farmers round about. They has a habit of dropping in here occasionally, like myself, on a dirty night like this."

"That's quite all right, constable," smiled Jack. "It's a dirty night, as you say."

"Yes, sir. But clearing up a bit now, sir. And the wind's falling, too. Going far tonight, sir?"

"Er—no—yes—pretty far," Jack stammered, taken aback for the moment.

"Come from London, I expect." The constable was inclined to be conversational.

This time Jack was ready for him. "No—quite the other direction."

"Begging your pardon again, sir. I didn't mean to be inquisitive. Only I thought—from the way the car was standing——"

"Oh, yes, of course," Jack interrupted. "You see, we lost our bearings a bit, and when we saw the light from this window it suddenly struck me that a nice little drink——"

"Wouldn't do you any harm!" put in the constable, with ponderous facetiousness.

"Exactly!" Jack forced a laugh.

Then he glanced at the landlord, who was surprizingly quick to take the hint.

"We'll have *ours* in the kitchen," the latter suggested, winking at Mr. Wills.

The constable looked knowing.

"Oh!" he said significantly, with what was meant to be a sympathetic smile at Sybil. "Well, mum, I wish you jolly good luck!" With that he turned and followed the landlord, who had already moved off toward the kitchen. The two went out together.

All this time Sybil had been sitting on the sofa, with her chin on her hands, gazing vacantly in front of her. Jack took up one of the glasses of whisky and brought it over to her.

"Now, little woman, drink this."

She started and shrank back with a shudder.

"I—I don't want it, Jack."

"You've got to drink it," he insisted. "Why, you're shivering. Come along!"

Reluctantly she took the glass and began sipping the hot whisky. Jack picked up the other glass.

"We both need it," he said. "It will help to keep out the cold when we continue our journey—one way or the other." He took a drink, then turned to her. "Well, Sybil, which way is it to be?"

"I don't know, Jack. I don't know."

There was a long silence. Outside, the rain had ceased. The wind, as the constable had remarked, was falling. Occasionally it emitted a faint moan, as though it were loth to die. It was the only sound that broke the sudden impenetrable stillness. Inside, the room seemed full of shadows. The single oil-lamp that illuminated it began to flicker, as if it were dying, too. Then the voices of the landlord and the constable floated in from the kitchen. One of them laughed, loudly. The sound seemed to break the spell.

"We must decide—soon," Jack said softly.

Desperately Sybil tried to think. She pressed her closed hands against her temples, hoping to still the throbbing there. She felt suddenly tired, unutterably tired. Not so much with a physical weariness; she was past realizing that. It was more a total indifference as to what was to happen to her. It had all at once enveloped her like a cloud, through which it was impossible to see anything clearly. The complete hopelessness of ultimate escape seemed to have dulled her senses. Her life had been a failure; that was the one thing that stood out clearly through the haze. What was the use of going on with it? It had been foolish to think that she could ever find happiness—even before that awful thing had happened. A mad impulse had led her to consent to run away. Anything was preferable to the daily hell of her existence. A mad impulse, yes. And in a mad moment she had imagined that her love for Jack, which, if not so deep as his love for her, was genuinely sincere, would carry her through. At that time her husband had been alive. So she had sinned, she supposed, at least in intention if not in fact. Her punishment would have been inevitable. It was just as inevitable now that her husband was dead. Alive, he would have followed her; she was sure of that. He was not the kind of man to let her go free. But now he was dead. It would make no difference. He would follow her just the same. Her cry to Jack a few moments ago had not been hysteria; it had sprung from a conviction, deep down in her being, that wherever she went her husband, dead or alive, would go with her. He had possessed her so utterly in life; he would possess her no less utterly in death. No; there was no escape, no escape. The words kept hammering themselves against her brain. Far better to go back at once and get it over.

Then she thought of Jack. If they went back, he would be the one to

suffer. She would be taking him to his death. For she realized that he had been right in what he said; he would stand no chance. Many a man had been hanged by less circumstantial evidence than that. Yet he was innocent—actually. What he had done had been done for love of her; because he knew that her life had become too bitter a thing for any human being to bear. They must go on—for Jack's sake. She must be the one to suffer, not he. Let the dead man follow her, as she knew he would, and make her life a hell again! What did it matter? Jack would never know—*must* never know. She would continue enduring to the end, and perhaps Jack would be happy.

With sudden resolution she stood up and began buttoning her motor-coat.

"I'm ready to go on, Jack," she said very quietly.

"That's right," he answered cheerfully. "We'll get away at once." He turned to pick up his coat. His mind was conscious of an overwhelming relief. He took out a cigarette and lighted it, then began putting on his coat.

Sybil moved toward the door. As she did so, it began to swing open very slowly. She stopped and stared at it with fascinated horror. The oil-lamp gave a convulsive flicker. Jack was still busy with his coat, and quite oblivious of what was happening. Sybil continued staring at the door, which was nearly wide open now. Outside was a cold, blue light, which might have been the moon. There was not a breath of wind. Then something intangible seemed to stir the silence. A dim shape hovered in the doorway. It was he—her husband! He had followed her, as she had said he would. He was dead, but he had followed her. Her eyes were fixed on him as he came nearer, nearer, with a noiseless tread. She wanted to move, to cry out, but the spirit of the dead man held her. Nearer and nearer. It was quite close now, that horrible nothingness. Suddenly she felt the clutch of invisible fingers round her throat. She tried to struggle, but she was turned to stone. The clutch of those fingers tightened, tightened. Her heart seemed to swell and swell, till it felt like bursting. Then all at once it snapped. With a piercing shriek she collapsed on the floor. Jack whipped round and flung himself on his knees beside her.

"Sybil! What is it? Sybil——!"

He raised her head from the floor. The landlord and the constable, attracted by Sybil's cry, came hurrying in.

"What's the matter, sir? Is the lady ill?" the landlord asked.

"She is—dead," Jack answered in a voice that had no color in it.

"Dead!" The constable stepped forward, and leaning down, peered at Sybil, supported in Jack's arms. "How did it happen?"

There was no answer. The constable knelt down beside Jack and peered more closely at Sybil. All at once he seemed to stiffen, and his eyes sought Jack suspiciously.

"The marks of fingers on her throat," he said heavily.

An Imaginative Fantasy Is

SADASTOR

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

LISTEN, for this is the tale that was told to a fair lamia by the demon Charnadis as they sat together on the top of Mophi, above the sources of the Nile, in those years when the sphinx was young. Now the lamia was vexed, for her beauty was grown an evil legend in both Thebais and Elephantine; so that men were become fearful of her lips and cautious of her embrace, and she had no lover for almost a fortnight. She lashed her serpentine tail on the ground, and moaned softly, and wept those mythical tears which a serpent weeps. And the demon told this tale for her comforting:

Long, long ago, in the red cycles of my youth [said Charnadis], I was like all young demons, and was prone to use the agility of my wings in fantastic flights; to hover and poise like a gier-eagle above Tartarus and the pits of Python; or to lift the broad blackness of my vans on the orbit of stars. I have followed the moon from evening twilight to morning twilight; and I have gazed on the secrets of that Medusean face which she averts eternally from the earth. I have read through filming ice the ithyphallic runes on columns yet extant in her deserts; and I know the hieroglyphs which solve forgotten riddles, or hint eonian histories, on the walls of her cities taken by ineluctable snow. I have flown through the triple ring of Saturn, and have mated with lovely basilisks, on isles towering league-high from stupendous oceans where each wave is like the rise and fall of Himalayas. I have dared the clouds of Jupiter, and the black and freezing abysses of Neptune, which are crowned with eternal starlight; and I have sailed beyond to incommensurable suns, compared with which the sun that thou knowest is a corpse-candle in a stinted vault. There, in tremendous planets, I have furled my flight on the terraced mountains, large as fallen asteroids, where, with a thousand names and a thousand images, undreamt-of Evil is served and worshipt in unsurmisable ways. Or, perched in the flesh-colored lips of columnar blossoms, whose perfume was an ecstasy of incommunicable dreams, I have mocked the wiving monsters, and have lured their females, that sang and fawned at the base of my hiding-place.

Now, in my indefatigable questing among the remoter galaxies, I came one day to that forgotten and dying planet which in the language of its unrecorded peoples was called Sadastor. Immense and drear and gray beneath a waning sun, far-fissured with enormous chasms, and covered from pole to pole with the never-ebbing tides of the desert sand, it hung in space without moon or satellite, an abomination and a token of doom to fairer and younger worlds. Checking the speed of my interstellar flight, I followed its equator with a poised and level wing, above the peaks of cyclopean volcanoes, and bare, terrific ridges of elder hills, and deserts pale with the ghastliness of salt, that

were manifestly the beds of former oceans.

In the very center of one of these ocean-beds, beyond sight of the mountains that formed its primeval shoreline, and leagues below their level, I found a vast and winding valley that plunged even deeplier into the abysses of this dreadful world. It was walled with perpendicular cliffs and buttresses and pinnacles of a rusty-red stone, that were fretted into a million bizarrely sinister forms by the sinking of the olden seas. I flew slowly among these cliffs as they wound ever downward in tortuous spirals for mile on mile of utter and irredeemable desolation, and the light grew dimmer above me as ledge on ledge and battlement on battlement of that strange red stone upreared themselves between my wings and the heavens. Here, when I rounded a sudden turn of the precipice, in the profoundest depth where the rays of the sun fell only for a brief while at noon, and the rocks were purple with everlasting shadow, I found a pool of dark-green water—the last remnant of the former ocean, ebbing still amid steep, insuperable walls. And from this pool there cried a voice, in accents that were subtly sweet as the mortal wine of mandragora, and faint as the murmuring of shells. And the voice said:

"Pause and remain, I pray, and tell me who thou art, who comest thus to the accursed solitude wherein I die."

Then, pausing on the brink of the pool, I peered into its gulf of shadow, and saw the pallid glimmering of a female form that upreared itself from the waters. And the form was that of a siren, with hair the color of ocean-kelp, and berylline eyes, and a dolphin-shapen tail. And I said to her:

"I am the demon Charnadis. But who art thou, who lingerest thus in this ultimate pit of abomination, in the depth of a dying world?"

She answered: "I am a siren, and my name is Lyspial. Of the seas wherein I swam and sported at leisure many centuries ago, and whose gallant mariners I drew to an enchanted death on the shores of my disastrous isle, there remains only this fallen pool. Alas! For the pool dwindles daily, and when it is wholly gone I too must perish."

She began to weep, and her briny tears fell down and were added to the briny waters.

Fain would I have comforted her, and I said:

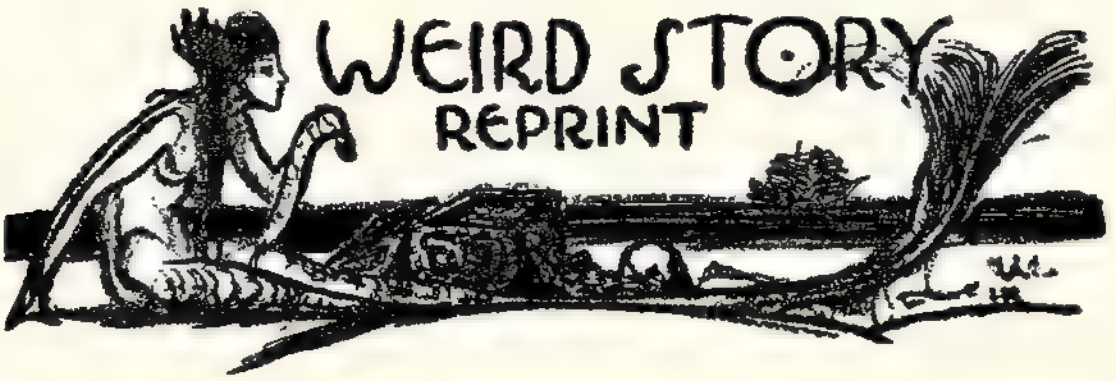
"Weep not, for I will lift thee upon my wings and bear thee to some newer world, where the sky-blue waters of abounding seas are shattered to intricate wens of wannest foam, on low shores that are green and aureate with pristine spring. There, perchance for eons, thou shalt have thine abode, and galleys with painted oars and great barges purpureal-sailed shall be drawn upon thy rocks in the red light of sunsets domed with storm, and shall mingle the crash of their figured prows with the sweet sorcery of thy mortal singing."

But still she wept, and would not be comforted, crying:

"Thou art kind, but this would avail me not, for I was born of the waters of this world, and with its waters I must die. Alas! my lovely seas, that ran in unbroken sapphire from shores of perennial blossoms to shores of everlasting snow! Alas! the sea-winds, with their mingled perfumes of brine and weed, and scents of ocean flowers and flowers of the land, and far-blown exotic balsams! Alas! the quinquiremes of cycle-ended wars, and the heavy-laden argosies with sails and cordage of byssus, that plied between barbaric isles with their cargoes of topaz or garnet-colored wines and jade and ivory idols, in the antique summers that now are less than legend! Alas! the dead captains, the beautiful dead sailors that were borne by the ebbing tide to my couches of amber seaweed,

in my caverns underneath a cedared promontory! Alas! the kisses that I laid on their cold and hueless lips, on their sealed marmorean eyelids!"

And sorrow and pity seized me at her words, for I knew that she spoke the lamentable truth, that her doom was in the lessening of the bitter waters. So, after many proffered condolences, no less vague than vain, I bade her a melancholy farewell and flew heavily away between the spiral cliffs where I had come, and clomb the somber skies till the world Sadastor was only a darkling mote far down in space. But the tragic shadow of the siren's fate, and her sorrow, lay grievously upon me for hours, and only in the kisses of a beautiful fierce vampire, in a far-off and young and exuberant world, was I able to forget it. And I tell thee now the tale thereof, that haply thou mayest be consoled by the contemplation of a plight that was infinitely more dolorous and irremediable than thine own.



A Child's Dream of a Star

By CHARLES DICKENS

THERE was once a child, and he strolled about a good deal, and thought of a number of things. He had a sister, who was a child, too, and his constant companion. These two used to wonder all day long. They wondered at the beauty of the flowers; they wondered at the height and blueness of the sky; they wondered at the depth of the bright water; they wondered at the goodness and the power of God who made the lovely world.

They used to say to one another sometimes, "Supposing all the children upon earth were to die, would the flowers, and the water, and the sky be sorry?" They believed they would be sorry. For, said they, the buds are the children of the flowers, and the little playful streams that gambol down the hillsides are the children of the water; and the smallest bright specks playing at hide-and-seek in the sky all night, must surely be the children of the stars; and they would all be grieved to see their playmates, the children of men, no more.

There was one clear shining star that used to come out in the sky before the rest, near the church spire, above the graves. It was larger and more beautiful, they thought, than all others, and every night they watched

for it, standing hand in hand at the window. Whoever saw it first, cried out, "I see the star!" And often they cried out both together, knowing so well when it would rise, and where. So they grew to be such friends with it, that before lying down in their beds, they always looked out once again, to bid it good-night; and when they were turning around to sleep, they used to say, "God bless the star!"

But while she was very young, oh, very, very young, the sister drooped, and came to be so weak that she could no longer stand in the window at night: and then the child looked sadly out by himself, and when he saw the star, turned around and said to the patient, pale face on the bed, "I see the star!" and then a smile would come upon the face, and a little weak voice used to say, "God bless my brother and the star!"

And so the time came, all too soon! when the child looked out alone, and when there was no face on the bed; and when there was a little grave among the graves, not there before; and when the star made long rays down toward him, as he saw it through his tears.

Now, these rays were so bright, and they seemed to make such a shining way from earth to heaven, that when the child went to his solitary bed, he dreamed about the star; and dreamed that, lying where he was, he saw a train of people taken up that sparkling road by angels. And the star, opening, showed him a great world of light, where many more such angels waited to receive them.

All these angels who were waiting turned their beaming eyes upon the people who were carried up into the star; and some came out from the long rows in which they stood, and fell upon the people's necks, and kissed them tenderly, and went away with them down avenues of light, and were so happy in their company, that lying in his bed he wept for joy.

But there were many angels who did not go with them, and among them one he knew. The patient face that once had lain upon the bed was glorified and radiant, but his heart found out his sister among all the host.

His sister's angel lingered near the entrance of the star, and said to the leader among those who had brought the people thither:——

"Is my brother come?"

And he said, "No."

She was turning hopefully away, when the child stretched out his arms, and cried, "O sister, I am here! Take me!" And then she turned her beaming eyes upon him and it was night; and the star was shining into the room, making long rays down toward him as he saw it through his tears.

From that hour forth the child looked out upon the star as on the home he was to go to when his time should come; and he thought that he did not belong to the earth alone, but to the star, too, because of his sister's angel gone before.

There was a baby born to be a brother to the child; and while he was so little that he never yet had spoken word, he stretched his tiny form out on his bed and died.

Again the child dreamed of the opened star, and of the company of angels, and the train of people, and the rows of angels with their beaming eyes all turned upon those people's faces.

Said his sister's angel to the leader:——

"Is my brother come?"

And he said, "Not that one, but another."

As the child beheld his brother's angel in her arms, he cried: "O sister, I am here! Take me!" And she turned and smiled upon him, and the star was shining.

He grew to be a young man, and was busy at his books, when an old servant came to him and said:——

"Thy mother is no more. I bring her blessing on her darling son!"

Again at night he saw the star, and all that former company. Said his sister's angel to the leader:——

"Is my brother come?"

And he said, "Thy mother!"

A mighty cry of joy went forth through all the star, because the mother was reunited to her two children. And he stretched out his arms and cried: "O mother, sister, and brother, I am here! Take me!" And they answered him, "Not yet." And the star was shining.

He grew to be a man whose hair was turning gray, and he was sitting in his chair by the fireside, heavy with grief, and with his face bedewed with tears, when the star opened once again.

Said his sister's angel to the leader, "Is my brother come?"

And he said, "Nay, but his maiden daughter."

And the man who had been the child saw his daughter, newly lost to him, a celestial creature among those three, and he said, "My daughter's head is on my sister's bosom, and her arm is round my mother's neck, and at her feet there is the baby of old time, and I can bear the parting from her, God be praised!"

And the star was shining.

Thus the child came to be an old man, and his once smooth face was wrinkled, and his steps were slow and feeble, and his back was bent. And one night as he lay upon his bed, his children standing round, he cried, as he had cried so long ago:——

"I see the star!"

They whispered one another, "He is dying."

And he said: "I am. My age is falling from me like a garment, and I move toward the star as a child. And, O my Father, now I thank thee that it has so often opened to receive those dear ones who await me!"

And the star was shining; and it shines upon his grave.

NIGHT TERROR

By SARA HENDERSON HAY

Lie still—the phantom stars are clear,
The moon is white against the snow—
Ah, Mary Mother, make Them fear
Even this candle's feeble glow—
Make Them afraid to enter here!

Its little gasping flame is all
We have, to guard and keep the sill
From things that wait, close-cloaked about
In darkness, where the shadows sprawl—
What should we do if it went out?—
Lie still . . .

The Bride of Dewer

(Continued from page 31)

"Madame Whitney, can you hear me?"

Still no response.

"*Très bon;* she has passed into unconsciousness," he said, and, turning to the sleeping girl:

"Anon, *Madame,* there will come one of fearful aspect, who will accost you—endeavor to do you violence. Be not afraid, *ma chère;* he can not harm you. I tell you this and you must believe. You do believe me, *Madame?*"

"I believe you," she answered sleepily.

"Good; it is well. When this one comes you will know it, though you will not see him; nor will your conscious mind realize he is here. And when he comes you will open both your eyes and say—attend me carefully, for you *must* say these words—'Dewer, enemy of my husband and of my husband's blood, depart from hence, and come not near me any more; neither near me nor any woman whom my husband's kinsmen take to wife. Dewer, go hence.'

"When first he does approach you, you shall say this, and ever you will keep your widely opened eyes upon his foul face, yet see him you will not, for I command it. And if he goes not quickly from you, you shall repeat the words of power, nor shall you show him any sign of fear. You understand?"

"I understand."

"*Très bien.* Into your bed then, and sleep and rest all peacefully until he comes."

Mechanically the girl arose, switched off the light and crossed to the bedstead, where she removed her slippers and kimono. In another moment her light even breathing sounded through the room.

I turned to descend the stairs to join Walter where he waited in the garden, but de Grandin's light touch upon my arm stayed me. "Not yet, my friend," he said; "come here, we should be near at hand in case our program goes awry." He led me toward the bathroom adjoining the suite.

IT SEEMED an hour that we waited, though actually it must have been much less. The mournful music of the frogs, the distant hooting of a motor horn, the nearer chirping of some troubled bird were all the sounds we heard except the girl's soft breathing. Then, far away, but drawing nearer by the second, came the drumming of a horse's hoofs.

I looked out the bathroom's single little window, then drew back with an involuntary cry. Across the moon's pale face, like a drifting wisp of cloud, yet racing as no tempest-chased cloud could race, there rode the squat, sinister figure of a naked horseman upon a barebacked horse.

A moment I held my breath in acute terror, and the short hairs at the back of my neck rose stiffly and bristled against my collar. Then, more dreadful than the moon-obscuring vision, there came the sound of slipping, shuffling feet upon the floor outside the room, the door swung inward, and a light, tittering laugh which seemed all malice and no mirth sounded in the quiet room. Another instant and a fetid, nauseating stench assailed my nostrils, and I turned my head away to get a breath of pure air from the open window.

But Jules de Grandin seized my shoulder and fairly dragged me to the door. My heart stood still and all the breath in my body seemed concentrated in my throat as I looked into the moonlit chamber.

Something unspeakably obscene

stood sharply outlined in a ray of silver moonlight, like an actor in some music hall of hell basking in the spotlight lit from the infernal fires. Like a toad it was, but such a toad as only lives in nightmares, for it was four or more feet high, entirely covered with gray-green skin which hung in wrinkles from its twisted form, save where it stretched drum-tight across a bulging, pot-like belly.

The head was more like a lizard's than a toad's, and covered with pendulous, snake-like tentacles. A row of similar excrescences decorated its upper lip, and a fringe of dangling, worm-like things hung down beneath its chin. The goggle eyes, round and protuberant, seemed to glow with an inward light, and turned their terrifying, lidless stare in all directions at once.

The monstrous thing paused tentatively in the moonlight a moment, and once again the wicked, lecherous titter came from it. "I'm here again, my sparrow," it announced in a high, cracked voice. "Last time your booby husband—*he, he!*"—again that awful laugh!—"disturbed us at our tryst, but he'll not hamper us tonight—the beaten god avoids his master!"

Again, seeming to struggle with some infirmity, the hideous thing lurched forward, but I had a feeling as I watched that those splayed, bandy legs could straighten instantly, and the whole flabby-looking body galvanize into frightful activity if need for action came.

Rosemary slept calmly, her head pillowed on one bent arm, and I heard de Grandin muttering mixed prayers and curses in mingled French and English as we waited her waking.

The visitant was almost at the bedside when Rosemary awakened. Rising as though in nowise terrified at the awful thing bending over her, she stared it boldly, calmly, in the face,

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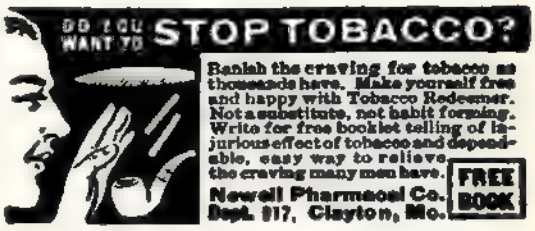
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no tremor of eyelid or twitch of lip betraying either fear or surprize.

"Dewer, enemy of my husband and of my husband's blood, depart from hence and come not near me any more; neither near me nor any woman whom my husband's kinsmen take to wife. Dewer, go hence!" she said.

The monster's webbed, clawed hands, already stretched forth to seize her, stopped short as if they had encountered an invisible wall of steel, and if such a thing were possible, its hideous face turned still more hideous. When pleased anticipation lit up its fearsome features they were terrible as the horror of a grisly dream, but when rage and unbelieving fury set on them the sight was too awful to look on. I hid my eyes behind my upraised hands.

But I did not stop my ears, so I heard it cry in a raging, squawking voice:

"Nay, nay, ye're feared o' me; ye dare not bid me hence! Look, ye soft, pink thing, 'tis Dewer stands beside ye; Old Dewer o' the North, at sight of whom men creep upon their bellies and women lose their senses. Ye dare not stare me in the face and bid me hence! Look ye, and be afraid!"

"Dewer," the soft calm words might have been addressed to a servant dismissed for pilfering from the pantry, "Dewer, enemy of my husband and of my husband's blood, depart from hence and come not near me any more!"

A skirling shriek like half a dozen bagpipes played out of tune at once came from the monster's mouth, and with a stamp of its wide, webbed foot, it turned and left the room. A moment later I heard the muffled beating of a horse's hoofs, and peering through the window saw a shade flit past the moon.

"And now, my friend, let us, too, depart," de Grandin ordered as he tiptoed from the bathroom.

By Rosemary's bed he paused a moment while he whispered: "One comes soon, *ma chère,* who brings you happiness; happiness and love. Awake and greet him, and may the mellow beams of the honeymoon forever light you on your path to blissfulness. *Adieu!*

"She waits above, *mon vieux,*" he called to Walter as we passed through the garden. "Be good to her, *mon fils,* her happiness is in your hands; guard well your trust."

He was oddly silent on the homeward drive. Once or twice he heaved a sentimental sigh; as we approached my house he frankly wiped his eyes.

"What's the matter, old chap?" I asked. "Aren't you satisfied with your work?"

He seemed to waken from a revery. "Satisfied?" he murmured almost dreamily. "*Ha*—yes. I wonder if she sometimes thinks of me within the quiet of her cloister, and of the days we wandered hand in hand beside the River Loire?"

"Who — Rosemary?" I asked, amazed.

"Who?—what?—*pardieu,* I do wander in my thoughts!" he cried. "I am asleep with both eyes open, Friend Trowbridge. Come, a quarter-pint of brandy will restore me!"

The Bagheeta

(Continued from page 40)

comfortable position, the falling of a pebble attracted his attention to the other bank of the stream. He could distinguish nothing. The water was as dark as the night. But from the water came a lapping sound. Something was drinking there at the edge of the creek. Kolya strained his eyes. He could see nothing. But as he continued to stare into the darkness he caught a gleam of eyes, yellow, round and burning as the burnished brass of the altar rail. Again Kolya heard the sound of water being lapped up by the rough tongue of the animal. The round, golden eyes were hidden as the creature drank.

Lifting his left hand to his mouth, Kolya ran his tongue across the palm and across the back of his fingers. Lifting it cautiously above his head he held it, palm forward, toward the Bagheeta. The palm of his hand felt colder than the back; the wind was blowing toward him. There was no danger of the Bagheeta taking his scent. But there was the danger that the Bagheeta might go back by the way he had come, without passing Kolya's ambush.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Kolya bent and picked up a large stone. With all his strength he threw it into the bushes on the other bank of the stream, then braced himself to cleave down his sword with all his might. The stone landed on the farther bank with a crash. Gold eyes turned up and, with a shriek, the Bagheeta flung herself across the stream and began to climb past Kolya.

With bated breath he waited until the powerful haunches had lifted the creature until its eyes were on a level with his own. For one moment the beast stared straight into his eyes; then Kolya's sword plunged down, slashing the black leopard's shoulder. The Bagheeta shrieked piercingly and

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fell back a few feet. Again Kolya struck at it, but the beast, snarling, rolled free. Kolya gathered himself and lunged forward with the point as if toward a human opponent. A great feeling of satisfaction flooded his heart as he felt the blade sink deep into the thick neck of the Bagheeta. There was a choking sound, the quick pant and insuck of painful breathing, and then silence. The Bagheeta was dead.

"It was so easy. It was so easy!" Kolya repeated the phrase again and again in wonderment.

Dawn was breaking. Thin, gray light began to filter into the wood. Mists and vapors like gray wraiths whirled without rime or reason between the tree trunks. Stiff-legged, body and tail relaxed, with blood flowing over the sandstone on which it lay, Kolya could see the Bagheeta. The heavy jaws gaped wide open, and the boy could see clearly the long, thick fangs of the beast. Its paws were thrust out stiffly, the claws, cruel as Tartar simitars, still unsheathed.

Kolya laughed a bit hysterically. It had been so easy, it had been so easy to kill this fearsome thing of dreadful aspect and terrible strength. Two cuts and a single thrust of his sharp sword had killed the Bagheeta. Tough sinews, tearing fangs and rending jaws had been subdued by the steel of his sword. There had been no magic trial of virtue and morals. Davil was a liar, and Rifkhas a true man.

KOLYA sank down upon a stone to rest himself, his eyes still drawn to the inert body of the leopard.

"How they will laugh at Davil when I tell them what a liar he is!" Kolya thought to himself. "How fat and respected he has grown on that one lie these many years! That song of his—with its beautiful maiden and terrible struggle—why, every child in Ghizikhan knows it by heart, and even the *hetman* believes it. What a lie!"

But then doubts began to steal into Kolya's mind. He thought deeply: "If this is untrue, if a Bagheeta is but a black leopard, no more dangerous than a spotted one, why then even the story about Lake Erivan having been created by the tears of God as he wept for the crucifixion of his only Son might be untrue. And the story of Saint Ilya the Archer and his arrows of fire, giving courage to the pure of heart in perilous places, might also be a lie. Even God might be a lie!"

But the gray dawn was ghostly. The trees moved mysteriously in the light winds and the half-light of the morning, and the mountain towered dimly toward the sky. Who knew what dread creatures stalked abroad in the mist? The trees might fall in upon him, the mountains topple to crush him! Kolya put the unreality of God quickly from his mind. A ray of light touched the peak of Silibal and it shone, rose-colored and white, against the blue sky of the morning.

Birds began to twitter in the bushes. A deer came to the water hole to drink, but, upthrusting her muzzle at the scent of the slain leopard, trotted off otherwheres.

"How they will laugh when I tell them what a liar Davil has been these many years!"

Stretching himself, Kolya rose, smiling, and prepared to return to where he knew the *hetman* and the *jigits* of the village awaited him.

He donned his *kaftan* and sword belt, replaced his dagger in its sheath, and started to cleanse his bloody sword with a wisp of grass. As he started on this task, a thought struck him. No, he must let the sword remain bloody—proof of the conflict. He laid it down in the grass carefully. Then, wondering at the weight and size of the animal, Kolya dragged the Ba-

gheeta to where he had tethered his horse. The mare plunged and curvetted at the sight of the dead animal and at the smell of its coagulating blood. When he had secured the body to the high cantle with thongs, Kolya picked up his bloody sword, untethered the horse and mounted into the saddle deliberately.

As the horse nervously threaded its way under the double burden of victor and vanquished, Kolya rode slowly out of the wood with the reins held tight in his left hand. His mind was busy. A thought had come to him. For years Rifkhas had said that a Bagheeta was but a black leopard among the spotted ones. The people of the village had only laughed at him. Davil, the liar, they loved and respected. Rifkhas they thought a strange man, a little mad from having lived so long alone in the woods.

"Even if they believed me," Kolya was thinking, "they would laugh at Davil only for a day, and then what? Then, no one would fear the Bagheeta any more. And so, no longer," Kolya reasoned, "would I be honored as a man who had slain a Bagheeta."

He said to himself: "Surely there must be some reason for this lie. Others have invented it so that they might appear brave and good in the eyes of the village."

And Mailka, Mailka would certainly never give herself to one who had betrayed her father's secret. How warm and softly firm her arm had felt against his shoulder that day she had washed his wounds by the well.

"I will do as Davil has done." Kolya spoke decisively. "I shall tell them that I first saw the Bagheeta as a beautiful maiden, bathing at the water hole, her body surrounded by a white light. That she called me by name and spoke to me courteously—and that, enchanted by her beauty, I had forgotten all warning and bent to kiss her. Then, I shall say that an arrow of fire sprang through the sky.

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Knowing it for the sign of Ilya the Archer, I will say that I took warning from this and, springing away from the maiden, drew my sword. So fast that I could not even see the change, the Bagheeta transformed herself again into a leopard and sprang at me. I shall tell them that we fought for an hour and then, just as I was ready to drop my sword from weariness, a great strength surged through me and I killed the beast. Even as Davil has done, so will I do."

At a sharp trot Kolya rode through the outskirts of the wood. Before him, cooking their breakfasts around little fires, were the men of Ghizikhan. With a great shout of triumph, Kolya struck heels to his horse and charged toward them. The men raised their voices in a hail of welcome which sounded thin and shrill among the mountains.

Kolya began to shout the words of Davil's song as he rode toward them:

"Half-way in air the leaping beast,
The cleaving sword, have met.
Now may the herdsmen joyful feast,
For sword and beast have met.

"I rode beneath the silver stars
And broke Bagheeta's sway——"

Kolya lifted his bloody sword high in the air, the cross of the hilt extended toward heaven, as if giving the victory to God. The men doffed their sheepskin caps and knelt in prayer at this proof of King God's all-powerful goodness.

"Blah!" said Rifkhas the huntsman, as he knelt with the rest.

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